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On the firing line

The Hoosier Volunteer

By
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"Langford of the Three Bars," and "The
Spirit Trail"

*Illustrated by
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The Hoosier Volunteer

CHAPTER I

“ PORE ZACK ”

THERE was plainly a lure to Sammy in the winey air of the September morning. He sauntered. His friends had always ascribed to him a thirst for knowledge of the lore of books surpassing, to a remarkable degree, the lesser thirsts of his contemporaries and satellites of the neighborhood. The word satellites is used advisedly, for even in that early day of his history, Sammy Goodman was a leader; seldom, consciously, a follower. The tattered and dog-eared copy of Webster's *Elementary Spelling Book* tucked under his arm gave convincing evidence that he was on his way to the “ hewed log ” hall of learning, where “ free school ” was called for the first time that morning after the long, languorous, Indiana summer vacation. As he wriggled his toes through the warm yellow dust of the woods road, he was not thinking of the school at all, except with an occasional feeling of repugnance to the thought of confinement on such a day as this.

There had been early frosts, and the arched roadway stretched before him a vista of color rampant. The maples were gorgeous in crimson and gold. The lordly beeches towered upward, still green and commanding. Glimpses of the bright scarlet of sumach bushes twinkled through the lower openings. Here and there was the ghostly gleam of the sycamore's mottled bark. Dense foliage overhead and tangled undergrowth beneath kept out all but the faintest occasional flicker of real morning sunshine, but the wealth of yellow and gold and crimson and green, of frost-kissed tree and bush and vine made the road of the primeval forest to glow with a dim, soft, warm, sweet-smelling light that was more attractive than sun to the woods-born.

Frost touches the world gently in southern Indiana; so gently that the blush of the first kiss lingers long and is loath to go, and glows deeper and deeper in anticipation of the next caress and the next and the next and yet another one — all light, gentle, loving, never harsh or impatient or joy-killing as are northern frosts — so that while the fall is always sad because it is the beginning of the end, sometimes, in singularly graced places of the world, the end is so radiant, so peaceful, lingering so happily on in a calm content in the decrees of the master magician, Nature, that the final slipping away comes without

shock or pain or regret. And these days when a sturdy, barefoot boy in homespun trudged along the woods road to “ free school ” were only the first days of the end. There was no hurry. Let all the world wait while he and Nature played awhile on the road. Sammy did n’t express himself thus, his thought did not even consciously shape itself thus, but it might have been what he meant when he said, as he shied a butternut at a bright-eyed squirrel peering around the trunk of a huge oak:

“ Wish ’t I did n’t have nothin’ to do but gather a few nuts and pack ’em down a hole in a tree! ”

By which remark, it may be seen that Sammy Goodman, now thirteen years of age, already considered himself weighed down by responsibilities and fettered by the mere humdrum of existence. The peculiarly pungent odor of dog fennel was in his nostrils. It augmented the strange dreaminess of his mood. A copperhead crossed his path. It was with an effort that he brought himself to kill it; and yet he had been known to hunt for hours for these poisonous creatures and to put out the light of their inheritance-cursed existence with the keenest delight. But today, why should any living thing be hurried to its death? Bumblebees, butterflies, pinchbugs, tree toads, katydids, the birds, all the short-lived and hibernating and migratory creatures of the woods

were dreamily rounding out their little day before the time to go. Why not let even snakes go in peace? But the belly-crawling were the natural prey of boys, therefore Sammy soon dismissed the thought of the ethics of the case with a hitch of his homespun trousers as he turned into Zachariah Posey's clearing.

He and Zack were cronies. It was because of Zack that he had forsaken the shorter way to pursue this winding road through the woods — Zack and that haunting desire of his own not to hurry this morning. His blue eyes brightened anticipatively under his old felt hat. The pioneer boys had little leisure for recreation. It had been many days since he and Zack had been able to snatch a few hours from the harvest for a play time, and even these few days ahead of them must be made the most of — to and from school and at recess — for soon both would be taken away for the late thrashing, and then would come the "corn-shuckin'." It would be winter in earnest before they could meet at the schoolhouse again, after these introductory days.

He emitted a shrill whistle. There was no response from the dreary looking log cabin with its cluttered dooryard. Zack's house was builded of unhewn logs only. His "pap" and "mam" were just plain "Hoosier," and had no such aristocratic notions as had the Goodmans.

“ Now what’s come over Zack? ” grumbled Sammy to himself, in surprise. “ ’Tain’t likely he’s already gone — he knew I’d be around this morning.”

He made his way to the rear door and pushed it open unceremoniously, scattering a few hungry looking hens from the stoop as he did so. A slatternly dressed woman with untidy hair glanced up from the batter she was mixing in a pan but did not remove her hands.

“ Oh, it’s you, Sammy, is it? ” she said, in a thin, high-pitched voice with a slight nasal twang in the tones. “ I ’lowed you’d be stoppin’ round for Zack. ’Pears like Zack’s sick. He hain’t et no breakfast yit this mornin’. How’s yer folks? ”

“ Yep, it’s me, Mis’ Posey,” replied Sammy. “ Everybody’s well to our house. What’s the matter with Zack? ”

This friendly interest elicited a deep groan from Zack himself, who sat humped up on a splint-bottomed chair drawn up to the kitchen table, his head in his hands. He was about Sammy’s age and size, only chunkier, and under the clothless table, one could see his unwashed bare legs propped against the rung of a chair. There was little distinction in dress in that day and neighborhood even between the “ hewed log ” and the “ just log ” cabiners; and yet somehow

the clothes of the two boys looked altogether different. It was not in the color of homespuns, for while Sammy's were stained blue with indigo and Zack's brown with walnut bark, that of itself was not a distinction but merely the result of a rotation. It was very likely that the next time yarn was spun, woven into cloth, dyed, and fashioned into clothing, all by his mother's own hands, at her own looms, Sammy would take his turn at wearing the brown, while perhaps Zack would be strutting around in new blues — perhaps, but not probably, because he usually had to make one suit last out two suits of Sammy's no matter how worn or dingy it became. Zack's father, not being so provident as Mr. Goodman, had scarcely enough sheep to go round and cover the nakedness of the numerous little tow-headed "Hoosiers" running wild around his clearing; while his mother, being neither so thrifty nor so resourceful nor so self-respecting — "proud," she herself designated it — as Mrs. Goodman, never seemed able to find the time to spin or weave except when driven to it by actual necessity. Therein lay the distinction. Sammy's galluses were neatly mended while Zack's were in a weird state bordering upon imminent dissolution. Sammy's shirt was clean and whole which was much more than could be said of Zack's. Moreover, Sammy's legs, while every bit as brown as

Zack's, had been washed before going to bed the night before and again before starting to school this morning. It was a reckless expenditure of water and energy, but then Mrs. Goodman had ideas.

Mrs. Posey looked at her son anxiously as he continued his dismal groans. His shock of uncombed, straw-colored hair was all that could be seen of his buried head.

“ 'Pears like he be gettin' worse,” she said. “ Do it hurt bad, Zackie? Where do it hurt? ”

“ Ain't you goin' to school? ” demanded Sammy, in unfeigned amazement, the real significance of Zack's sudden illness dawning upon him for the first time.

Zack only groaned and shook his head.

“ He can't. He 's sick,” Mrs. Posey answered for him, commiseratingly. “ It 's too bad. He sets such store by the school. Pore Zack. He do hate to miss.”

Sammy stared at his friend suspiciously but he did not voice his suspicions aloud, unless his sympathetic, “ He does n't look sick,” was double-edged. “ Is it colic? ” he asked, as Zack groaned more lugubriously than ever at even this hint of unbelief. “ Reckon you 've been eatin' green paw paws or persimmons. Well, I 'll have to be goin', ” he continued, turning toward the door.

“ You tell teacher over yander to the school that Zack he ’s sick,” admonished Mrs. Posey, lifting her dough to the molding board. “ I ’m jist makin’ him up some fresh biscuit for to tempt his appetite. His pap and the young uns have et long ago. I do n’t know what ails him. Is it your stummick, Zackie? ”

“ I — I — reckon so,” gasped the boy, “ and fever and aguey, I ’m a-feared — ’less it ’s typhus or ’flammatory rheumatism or pneumony fever — I don’t know which it is. Oh, I do feel so bad! ”

“ Maybe you ’ll feel better after you ’ve et,” consoled his mother, hastening to roll out the dough and to take down an immense biscuit cutter.

“ I ’m too sick to eat hearty,” said Zack, “ so you need n’t make more ’n five. I do n’t feel ekal to more ’n five, mam, honest, I do n’t. I ’m too sick to eat hearty.”

Mrs. Posey glanced quickly at Sammy, but Sammy’s face was as sober as that of a judge, albeit there was a merry little twinkle in his eyes that the woman failed to see. It was partly this power of keeping his thoughts to himself and “ fitting in ” to any occasion that made Sammy Goodman so often seem much older than he really was.

“ Pore Zack — he always eats more when he ’s

sick,” explained his mother, excusingly. As did many others of the simple folk about, Mrs. Posey considered Sammy a very wise and learned personage and she thought it just possible that he might think Zack was “ playing ’possum ” and she did not want him to think what was so obviously untrue.

“ Goin’ tomorrow?” was Sammy’s only comment.

“ I reckon he ’ll be all right tomorrer,” the mother hastened to spare her son the inconvenience of answering, “ if I give him a right smart o’ keerin’ fer today. You step round fer him tomorrer and see.”

“ I do n’t know,” said Sammy. “ It ’s a good piece out of the way.” He slammed the door and was gone.

As he trudged down the lonely road, he could not make up his mind whether he was the more provoked with Zack for his cowardly shirking or with himself for not doing likewise. In his heart, he knew that it was only a question of a few days before he would hold school a Paradise as compared with thrashing wheat or shucking corn; besides, he knew that when he once opened his book in the old puncheon-floored schoolhouse the overwhelming desire to know — just to know things — would supersede all else and he would be content with the new environment; but today,

his bare feet lingered still, although he realized that he must be already late. He did not want to do anything today but just to be out of doors and to play like the birds and the squirrels and all the woodsy things and — Zack. But with a vague realization that Zack's shirking school that morning was only another manifestation of the generally conceded shiftlessness of Zack's family, and with a sense of his own responsibilities upon him because of his superior advantages, Sammy suddenly pulled his hat down over his eyes and scudded toward the schoolhouse.

In after years, he often thought, a little smilingly, a little sadly, of his strange reluctance to hurry on that long ago morning of early frost, and of that intense, unaccountable desire to play by the wayside which had kept his usually eager footsteps lagging — just lagging along. For the time came all too soon when there was no more play for Sammy Goodman — neither for him nor for any of the young manhood of his generation.

CHAPTER II

“SAMMY GOODMAN, WILL YOU LEAD THE WAY?”

THERE followed a week of droning study aloud, wherein the dullest scholars made much the most noise, which proved Sammy's wisdom in wishing to choose his own benchmates; a week of heroic wrestling with the *American Preceptor* and with Webster's *Elementary Spelling Book*, ending with an exciting catchword spelling-down contest on Friday afternoon, wherein Captain Zachariah Posey, having miraculously escaped fever and ague, typhoid fever, inflammatory rheumatism, and pneumonia, went down to sure defeat because he had not been able to withstand the “come hither” in Mary Ann Hamilton's bashful brown eyes. The whole school had gasped in sheer unbelieving astonishment when the first choice had been made — that Zachariah Posey of all people should fail, when the lot fell to him, triumphantly to summon Sammy Goodman to his aid, Sammy Goodman, the best speller in the entire county, besides being his sworn comrade of long standing, just because he wanted a certain girl to “set next him,” was incredible. Sammy himself could scarcely believe the

evidence of his own sense of hearing, but he managed to appear supremely indifferent to the surprise sprung upon him, and to gaze nonchalantly out of the window up in the front wall, the only window, by the way, which the room contained. He did not have to gaze long. If Zack had cherished a faint hope that Sammy might be reserved for his second choice, he was quickly disillusioned.

“Sammy Goodman!” came in such quick, explosive tones from the rival captain’s lips that it was very plain to be seen he could hardly believe his good fortune, and that he was afraid the chance might slip away from him, even yet, if he did not clinch it instantaneously.

Not the least surprising feature of the whole affair was the fact that it was Sammy Goodman, himself, who was supposed to hold a peremptory claim upon the affections of little Mary Ann Hamilton; so that it was rather presumptuous, to say the least, on the part of Zack Posey deliberately to call her to “set next” in preference to the best speller in the county and the more than half-suspected knight in homespun of this same brown-eyed Mary Ann. But this nine days’ wonder was finally reasoned out by the majority of the school to have occurred because of Zack’s well-known loyalty to and admiration of his boy hero — Sammy Goodman. So unwaveringly

had he formed himself upon his friend since the beginning of time that it was supposed by his mates that he could not even be individual in affairs of the heart. Perhaps they were right. Anyway, he chose Mary Ann and defeat without wincing and only loved Sammy the more for his magnanimity when he said, on the way home from school, chewing a sassafras twig meditatively the while:

“I hated to beat you and Mary Ann, Zack, but you know a fellow has to uphold his reputation — if he can. I could spell daguerreotype and I’d a felt like a sneak and a liar to have said I could n’t. I think it’s a sort of responsibility to do the best one can. I would n’t have cared if it had been anybody but you.”

“Why, I knew you’d do it, Sammy,” said Zack, shuffling his calloused toes through the warm dust of the road. “I ’lowed when I chose Mary Ann I’d be beat all hollow, but I jist thought she looked as if she’d feel right peart to be chosen first.”

“I — think she did, Zack,” said Sammy, quietly, which further proof of magnanimity so added to Zachariah’s boyish adoration that he could only stare silently at his shuffling feet and so forgot entirely to see if the pawpaws were ripe on a certain bush that grew some distance off the road. He had known just where to leave the

trail and plunge through the crawling undergrowth of the roadside. It was full early but that was an early tree. By the time he thought of it, however, they had long passed the spot, so the little excursion was left for another day.

And so Sunday came and with it Sammy's glorious chance to get even, though, to his credit be it said, that was not his intention at all. He was not afraid of Zachariah Posey.

In the old days, Sundays had not been happy days for Sammy Goodman. Even now, in retrospect, they brought forth shuddering sensations of terror lived through but not forgotten. Hell-fire was still preached and awful warnings of doom were hurled from every meeting house where self-constituted, itinerant preachers, who believed they had heard a call, expounded, conscientiously or otherwise, as the case might be, a grievously misunderstood Christian code; but Sammy, though only thirteen, found himself gradually becoming more amused than awe-stricken as he listened to the terrible echoes of that dread, paralyzing word picture which had issued from Kentucky and spread so rapidly over a trembling world: "—hair-hung and breeze-shaken over the mouth of hell!" His father was his hero, and though never in all his young life had he heard that kindly, genial, just man utter one disparaging remark concerning these

preachers of unthinkable doom, or voice one doubt of the doctrine of literal brimstone whose hot and unwholesome breath had been breathed into the beautiful, sweet-aired, ancient-wooded, virginal valley of the Ohio, yet Sammy knew, in his own heart, that his father cherished other ideals of a Christ who came to redeem the world, not to condemn it. It was because of his faith in his father, and his growing belief that God would never hold that good man “hair-hung and breeze-shaken over the mouth of hell” for the very mistakes which his father so freely forgave him every day of his life, that Sammy, these later days, had begun to emerge from the awful thrall-dom of his childhood’s fears and to look the blessed sunshine of the world full in the face. But he winced, even yet, remembering the sufferings of those baby days when he first began to realize, with a sickening of the heart, the dire meaning of that oft repeated phrase — the Age of Accountability. That age was seven years. He should never forget so long as he lived the haunting horror that brooded over his days and nights — thinking — thinking — how very soon he would be seven — and counting the years — the months — the very days before that awful birthday. For on that day, his innocence would fall from him and he would henceforth be held accountable to his God for his deeds. When the

time finally came, a new thought was given him which bred unavailing regret and clouded his sky for many and many a day. They were hoeing corn in the little cleared field, he and his brother Herbert — four years older. It was a blistering day in July. His back ached, his feet burned, and there was that miserable consciousness, no matter how hard he worked or how he tried to forget, that God was watching him for he was seven years old today. And then Herbert had said, resting a moment from his labor:

“Do n’t you wish you had died before today, Sammy?”

“Why?” Sammy had asked in wonder, spitting on his little blistered hands to ease the pain of them.

“Why, then you ’d ’a’ gone to Heaven sure — cause nobody ’s responsible before they ’re seven. And now probably you won’t — ’cause what you do now is sin. I ’ve always wished I ’d died while I was six. It must be awful to burn forever.”

Sammy’s blue eyes had filled with tears and his little brown face had grown strangely white, but Herbert had returned to his own row, little dreaming of the woe he had planted in his young brother’s breast. He himself firmly believed in what he had said. He had lost sleep over it in other days, but he was older now and bore it more

philosophically. Besides, he had never been as sensitive as Sammy; so he went back to his work unwittingly.

“Oh, oh!” was Sammy’s passionate, inner cry. “Why did n’t I die yesterday? Oh, why could n’t I have died when I was a baby and innocent? If I had only thought, I — might have jumped in the well or the swimmin’ hole or — or — stayed in the woods all night till a painter got me — and then I ’d a gone to Heaven! And now — ” his childish soul stood appalled before the enormity of his responsibilities for his sins. Now he would burn forever. How could he bear it and live? And yet he dared not die — not now — it was too late. If he could only have died yesterday!

Yes, memory still made him wince, but, secure in the consciousness — how it came about that he knew, Sammy himself could not have told — that his hero father put little credence in a physical and everlasting fire, aided and abetted by his own rapidly developing reasoning powers, and his sensitive little soul soothed by the peaceful passing of the years under the cabin roof of the pioneer scholar from North Carolina, Sunday had come to represent to Sammy the most interesting day of the seven. It still had its drawbacks, for his mother was a strict disciplinarian and allowed no nonsense on the sacred day, but from the time

he began to be first interested — after the paralysis of fear which was merely dread fascination, not interest, had passed away — then doubtful, then amused, and lastly sympathetic in a removed, superior sort of way — thirteen can be wonderfully superior, sometimes — Sunday ceased to pall, with all its restrictions and with all its long and gloomy sermons on the terrible doom of the world. In truth, those sermons came to be a source of delight to him in more ways than one — as will be shown later — especially the sermons of old man Craik who was to preach on this particular Lord's day which was to be marked by important events for Sammy.

Old man Craik was a "Campbellite," and he hailed from Tennessee. He knew nothing of books. It was his proud boast that he preached from the Bible alone. He had felt no need of preparation for his holy calling. Was not ability to read the Word with an understanding heart enough? He had heard the call, had answered it without hesitation; and to the majority of the pioneers — to their credit be it said — his fervor and manifest honesty covered a multitude of faults, in the interpretation of Scripture as well as in the use of the English language. There were many unlettered, itinerant preachers of that early day whose motives were far from being as pure and devoted as were those of old man Craik.

There were to be two meetings that Sunday, the morning service to be followed by baptism, and a later one to begin at “early candle lightin’ time.” Both meetings were to be held in the Goodman schoolhouse. People came from far and near. Many brought lunch baskets, purposing to remain for the evening service. Other distant ones were guests of the families of the neighborhood. The woods, tall and vibrant with the secrets of primevalism, crept up close to the little clearing, and a circle of teams was hitched to the inner edge of them, while in the house the reverent company silently waited.

“We will now open the sarvices by singing a hymne,” announced Craik, when the last stragglers had filed slowly in, and the “hymne” was droned forth to the bitter end, led by the preacher, unaided by so much as a tuning fork. After which, the long, long, prayer, and the longer sermon, in nasal singsong, rose and fell whiningly upon the listening air of the little schoolroom and then fled out of the open door harshly to dominate for awhile and then softly to mingle with the vague whisperings of the forest, and finally to die away altogether. Old man Craik, as was the fashion of that day, had a fixed habit of sustaining his voice in a high, monotonous, whining chant to a seemingly measured distance, and as regularly dropping it into an

expressionless, still singsongy, long-drawn-out "ah —."

"And now, my brethren," he continued, after more than an hour's dissertation on the Judgment, "we are plainly told that the end will be foretold by signs — ah — and that there will be wars and rumors of war and wondrous miracles — ah — and oh, my brethren, has not the time come — ah — have we not seen signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars — ah — oh, give heed to the miracle of the falling star — ah — it is a sign foretold by Christ Himself — ah — only last month a star left its fixed place in the sky — ah — it flashed through the air and fell to earth — ah — from the place where it had dwelt since the beginning of the world — ah — oh give heed, my brethren, to the sure coming of the Lord — ah — He said it should be when the stars in Heaven should fall — ah — and He will gather His elect from the four winds — ah — and from the uttermost parts of the earth — ah — oh, my brethren, have you made sure that you are of the elect — ah — and the star weighed full seventy pounds — was n't that so, Sammy Goodman?"

The anti-climax was not altogether a surprise to Sammy. It was not the first time he had been called upon to verify statements made from the pulpit in the heat of oratory. Old man Craik realized that Sammy Goodman's mental grasp of

the contents of the newspaper was much more to be relied upon than was his own — as well as his memory thereof. He was actuated in his appeal by two motives. He was really conscientiously averse to making a false statement and thus deliberately deceiving his people; and he dreaded that little spark of ridicule in Sammy Goodman's eyes when he fell down on his facts. He could not rid himself of the feeling that Sammy always knew when he was treading on thin ice. This was one of the aforementioned delights that Sammy derived from the sermons. It flattered him immensely, this deference, although nothing could convey a more superb appearance of indifference than did his careless nod of affirmation. No one would have dreamed from his calm, matter-of-fact demeanor that he was wondering if Mary Ann Hamilton were not proud of his friendship and protection; and he said to himself, with patronizing generosity, that whatsoever the future might hold for him, he should always be good to little bashful-eyed Mary Ann; he should never, never repudiate his friendship with the little backwoods maiden. Neither could any one know the real heroism it required on his part not to turn to her where she sat across the aisle for her glance of sure, if shy, admiration. Hard as it was, however, he still kept his face serenely forward.

There was another person unexpectedly present toward whom Sammy had an almost irresistible desire to turn his head, but he conquered this impulse also. If he had caught this person's eye, he should very probably have winked — there was no doubt at all about the other fellow's having done so — and as the person had dropped down upon a bench close to the door, and as Sammy was way up toward the front, plainly such a procedure would not have done at all. Bold as he was, even Sammy hardly dared brave the phalanx of righteous, accusing eyes which stretched between and which would have immediately waylaid and withered such a glance had he dared essay it. He was surprised to see his friend at meeting. Old Dan Carmichael was without the pale. He was considerably addicted to the use of Kentucky "cawn juice" as his flushed face bore constant testimony, and more than considerably addicted to blasphemy. In truth, he was a past master in both of these liberal arts. And yet in spite of the blackness of his sins, old Dan Carmichael was a hero in the eyes of Sammy Goodman, Zachariah Posey, and all the boys on and in the neighborhood of the old Buffalo Trace in that particular spot of pioneer southern Indiana — and this notwithstanding parental disapproval and authority that often failed lamentably of enforcement, because the fathers and mothers

themselves could not altogether resist the attraction of old Dan's merry, twinkling eyes, his inexhaustible fund of good stories, and his friendliness toward all the world in particular but toward never a democrat in general. He himself was an old line Whig of the deepest dye. In that day, young people were still brought up in wholesome respect of the superior wisdom and judgment of their elders, so it is to be feared that the parents were themselves much to blame for the laxity in moral practice which welcomed this grizzled veteran of the War of 1812 to every hearthstone in the neighborhood — where the boys crowned him King of Heroes.

It was from him that they received their first lessons in the wars of their land, and they derived therefrom a burning love and zeal for the heroism, the patriotism, of war; for these tales around the crackling logs of an open fire on a winter's night were enough to inspire the ardor of American boyhood, whose love of country ever lies so near the surface that a spark will start a conflagration which, when the time comes, no chemical, no rush of water will smother — nothing will avail but the red heart's blood of that country's bravest and best.

Sammy was an especial favorite of Dan's, and the old man never wearied of telling his tales over and over again to this eager listener. If

these memory pictures, inevitably faded a little by the flight of nearly forty-five years, and re-colored by imagination, sometimes showed more of the pomp and circumstance of war, and its golden opportunities, Sammy Goodman, listening with dreamy eyes fixed upon the red coals in the fireplace, saw, also, with a strange prescience, the shadows in the background.

Sammy knew that this friend would appreciate the situation of his being called upon from the very pulpit itself, and yet he refrained from gratifying his inclination for a backward glance, even as he had kept heroically turned away from the worship in Mary Ann Hamilton's eyes.

But that was not all. This proved to be a veritable day of triumphs for Sammy. The long sermon was ended at last, and what was that old preacher Craik was saying?

"We'll now repair to the water's aidge, and there perform the solemn ceremonies of baptism. Sammy Goodman, will you lead the way?"

And Sammy led the way out of the little meeting house with a nonchalant air of familiarity with the duty imposed upon him that was impressive, to say the least, the entire congregation filing out from the rude benches to follow in the wake of the little figure in homespun and the stiff, unaccustomed shoes of Sunday.

Old man Craik judged it well for the dignity

and order of the baptismal procession to the waters of purification that it be conducted thither by a leader; thus all straggling, hesitation through ignorance of locality, and any unseemly levity which might arise with the scattering of the people into pairs and groups would be averted, and the Lord's day decorum unprofaned. Who, then, better knew the way to that sacred spot of boyhood, the “swimmin' hole” in Crooked Creek, than Sammy Goodman — the quickest way and the easiest, so that the only deep water near at hand might be reached before the feeling of solemnity engendered by the impassioned sermon be dissipated? It was a secluded spot in a winding creek, much better known to boys than to men; and it had already been proved that Sammy Goodman would neither giggle, nor stammer, nor whistle, nor throw stones, nor stub his toes, nor run ahead nor lag behind, nor give way to any expression of extreme embarrassment, by one or all of which symptoms most boys in a similar position would be immediately attacked. Under Sammy's leadership, the procession wound through the brilliantly colored woods in a seemly and dignified manner, and those touched to repentance went down into the cool, dark, placid waters of the shaded creek with the benediction of peace and quiet and orderliness.

But, after all, Sammy was only a boy and embarrassment found at last the vulnerable heel. He was greatly surprised himself. He had thought that after the accumulation of triumphs this day had heaped upon him he would be bold enough to defy all the world and to meet the obstacles put in the way of the males of his kind — obstacles like embarrassment in the presence of a girl and reluctance to let one's fellows know that one's heart harbors a fondness for the gentle sex — like a man. By a supreme effort of the will, aided by the remembrance of his morning's triumphs and his thrilled consciousness that *she* was glad for him and proud of him, he had courageously surmounted the first earthwork thrown up in his path; but he weakened before the last and — ignominiously went around it.

“ Say, Zack,” he said, carelessly, coming up to his friend while the congregation was dispersing — the newly baptized and their friends having first hastened up the bank and away to their several homes or visiting places to change their dripping garments — “ you pack my Test'ment home, will you? Pap and mam have gone and I would n't ask Herb to pack it for a million dollars.”

“ All right,” responded Zack, good-naturedly, taking possession of his hero's book, “ come along, Sammy, most everybody's gone. My, I

wisht I was as smart as you.” His freckled face beamed with boyish affection and veneration.

“I can’t come now,” said Sammy, with a fine air of regretful impatience. “That’s why I wanted you to take my book.”

“Ain’t comin’!” ejaculated Zack, in as much surprise as Sammy himself had displayed when informed of Zack’s sudden and alarming illness on the first day of school. When had it ever happened that he and Sammy Goodman had not walked home from school or meeting together?

“Nope. You see — the woods get awful dark and lonesome along in the afternoon and none of her folks could come today. She’s terrible afraid of bears and painters and hants — huh — just like a girl. There ain’t been any bear or painter or hant seen in these woods since — I do n’t know when, ’ceptin’ at night of course, but then that’s just like girls. They’re afraid of their shadows. It’s an awful long ways to her place, and I’m kind o’ tired already. There she is waiting. No help for it, I suppose. Little fraid-cat! Dum it all, Zack, I has to go home with Mary Ann, and I hates to, too!”

It was thus that he got even with Zachariah Posey for the effront of the spelling match, although, as has been before intimated, that was not his object at all.

CHAPTER III

CROOKED CREEK BOTTOM

“**S**AMMY! Sammy Goodman! Get right up this minute! Do you hear? Your father has the team all ready and the biscuits are stone cold! This is the third time I have called you! I sha’ n’t call again!”

And Sammy, roused from his dreams by the tone of real finality in his mother’s voice — which he was quick to recognize — awoke to the fact that the light streaming in at his tiny attic window was the forerunner of a fair day, and fair weather meant thrashing and no more school for awhile at least. How he had hoped to be awakened by the sound of rain upon the roof! He tumbled lazily out of bed. Herbert’s place by his side had been vacant a long time. He had a faint remembrance of a spectral rising in the dim dawn and of a good-natured admonition to “get up before mam gets after you!” That seemed a long time ago. He began to fear that he had let “mam” call once too often. But his smile was so engaging and his forbearance so fetching when Mollie and Ama Jane, the baby sisters, pressed around him, begging him to tie their hair

and button their dresses, that, with a tender smile in her heart which she was too busy to show, the mother decided to forget about the scolding she had been saving up for some time; so she only said,

“Hurry up, Sammy! Pap ’ll be real angry if you are n’t ready for breakfast.”

“Well,” Sammy consoled himself, as he munched his hickory-smoke-cured ham and sopped up the red gravy with a biscuit, miraculously hot in spite of his mother’s warning, “there won’t be anybody at school today anyway but girls and little tads. I won’t be the only big fellow thrashing, thank goodness! I reckon this won’t putt me back a great deal.”

“Son,” said Mr. Goodman, gravely, “Zack is a nice boy. I have n’t a thing in the world against him — as a boy — but do n’t you really think that your father and mother make better models on which to fashion your use of language? Zack talks his mother tongue and he cannot be blamed for that — but it is neither your mother tongue nor your father tongue,” concluded this pioneer scholar, with the twinkle of a smile in his kindly eyes.

“Mary Ann Hamilton says ‘putt,’ ” said Herbert, innocently. “It is n’t her mother tongue, either. Now, I wonder if she is copying after Sammy here or Zachariah Posey?”

If Herbert expected an entertaining scene at the breakfast table because of Sammy's known explosiveness of temper on those occasions when his big brother's teasing went a trifle too far, he was disappointed. This morning, Sammy was still enveloped with the delicious sense of superiority and power with which yesterday had clothed him. He even felt at that moment pleasantly superior to Herbert — Herbert, whom his boyish heart had idolized and built itself upon in secret these many years — so he could well afford to smile loftily and to put off "getting even" until some future time when forbearance should cease to be a virtue, which time, he reckoned from past experience, would surely come some day.

Mr. Goodman had rented a certain piece of land on Crooked Creek Bottom from a neighbor, Hank Halstead, and had put it into wheat. Thither were he and Sammy bound on that Monday morning — to load and haul the grain to the thrashing ground on his own clearing across the creek from the rented strip. This thrashing ground was an index of the primitive methods of farming which prevailed at that time and in that locality. A ring, similar to that of a circus, had been excavated and the ground within the circle repeatedly dampened and trampled upon until it was as hard as a floor. Here Sammy and Herbert and other helpers would wear away the

long, weary, monotonous hours of the day in a ceaseless round of riding the circle — the hoofs of their horses beating the grain from the chaff. Remembering other days of riding doggedly around and around the ring when the sun beat hot upon his head and he was so tired and dizzy that it seemed sometimes as if his bare legs could no longer cling to the broad back of the horse, it was little wonder Sammy had longed so ardently for the sound of rain driving against his window when he awakened that morning. And yet in after years, some of the tenderest memories of his life were associated with those hours and hours of the crude thrashing of wheat on horseback. Such a glance backward brought ever a smile into his man's eyes even while a sob of homesickness for the old tranquil order so soon passed away would rise in his throat at the same time. For these reminiscences were all sacred with the memories of the best man he ever knew — the pioneer father who had not lived to see the passing of that old order.

It had been an unusually wet summer, and, shortly after the grain had been cut and shocked, had come the heaviest rain of the whole season. Crooked Creek rose and overspread its banks, reached out and caught at the standing shocks and bore them out to the current of the stream which had become temporarily a raging torrent.

They were torn apart and shattered and fully one-half of the fair yellow crop was completely destroyed.

"Man, are you crazy?" Hank Halstead had cried in angry and ugly concern over the prospect of his personal loss. "I 'lowed you 'd move that there wheat back long ago! Didn't you know the crick was sure to raise and sweep all over this here bottom?"

"I am very sorry," Mr. Goodman had answered, quietly, "but I never dreamed of such a contingency. You must remember this is the first time I have ever planted on this particular bit. I was only following your tactics, neighbor. I never knew you to move your grain back when you farmed this piece, so, naturally, I never thought of it."

"After all this wet weather?" Halstead had continued to argue, heatedly. "Any man in his senses, seems to me, would have anticipated just such a state of things as has come to pass. Just 'cause a crick behaves herself one year is no sign she won't act up another time, is it? Specially when we've had nothing but rain, rain, rain, all this cussed summer?"

"I should have counted it right neighborly in you to have given me a friendly warning — since you yourself were so convinced of impending disaster," Mr. Goodman had responded, still quietly,

although a dark flush had risen to his face and his eyes — deeply blue, like Sammy's — began to gleam with strange lights. "You must have known that the wheat was left on the bottom to dry out before it was advisable to thrash it."

"And gotten a laugh for my pains, like enough," said Halstead, morosely. "No, thank you. There's no telling you high and mighty ones anything. You already know it all. It was your business — not mine. Why should I interfere? You'd have told me to go to hell — you were running this place. Well, I'll take what's left and call it square this time. Another time, maybe you will be wiser."

"Not so fast, my friend," said Mr. Goodman, allowing his glance to pass lightly over the devastated field while he mentally calculated the worth of what might yet be saved from the wreckage. "The loss is, of course, a mutual one. As I said before, I am very, very sorry that this has happened, but as I could not foresee it, I hold myself blameless for the — uncomfortable accident. We shall just have to put it down to profit and loss. We-all hereabouts considered that the summer rains were over. You did yourself, Halstead. And it was too early for the fall wet weather. While I repeat I am sorry that I have not been a better husbandman, we will stick to the terms of our agreement,

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Mr. Halstead, and share what is left according to the contract."

Instantly, Halstead's anger leaped beyond his control. He was a lean, dark, sallow-faced man of middle age upon whom the tyrannical wearing away process of uncontrolled passion, covetousness and greed had left ineradicable trace. He was not in any way the physical or mental equal of the big, clean, erect, kindly-faced man before him, with dark hair just turning gray at the edges and eyes so habituated to calm and contentment and in-dwelling peace with all the world that even now in their sternness they could not be wholly non-understanding or condemnatory; and yet the weaker man dared to let his temper fly in the face of the stronger, while he reiterated his unalterable determination to have all that was left of the wheat.

"It would be so unfair otherwise," he cried out at last, "that it would be no better than stealing! You think to take advantage of me because you are — who you are, and bigotry with book larnin', while I 'm only a poor devil of a cracker, I suppose you think in your big feeling way — but I tell you right now I 'm not — I 'm every bit as good as you are and you will do well not to try to cheat me out of what is my own!"

For two or three long seconds, fate hung in the balance. Mr. Goodman was himself now so

thoroughly angry that, if he had struck then, it is more than likely that he would have struck so hard and so true that many things would have been different in the lives of many people. For fate weaves in seconds, though we are wont to shift responsibility by trying to deceive ourselves into the belief that the pattern was all completed before the world began. He had been likened to a thief — he, Gerry Goodman — but, by whom? Was it worth while to soil his hands and his conscience by knocking down a man like Hank Halstead, who was so palpably not a gentleman? Moreover, the terms of the agreement were so plainly set forth that, on second thought, Halstead must see how futile would be any attempt to obtain undivided possession of the remainder of the wheat. He, Goodman, would give the man time to cool off and to perceive the fallacy of his contention. So he turned on his heel, abruptly, without a word, and left Halstead staring after him on the wet and soggy field.

Thus matters stood on that fair, early morning in September when Gerry Goodman and his son, Sammy, were preparing to drive over after the wheat for the late thrashing. Sammy was already in the wagon and had taken up the lines, while his father was still puttering about the harness, when they saw Zachariah Posey, young Zack's father, coming down the lane. His easy,

unhurried, slouchy gait betokened laziness, good nature, content.

"Howdy! You're a-gittin' a early start, Mr. Goodman," was his salutation, as he came up and leaned against a front wheel. From some wheat heads adhering to the wagon box from some previous hauling, he slowly extracted the kernels and chewed them enjoyingly. All the time that there was in the world seemed to be Zachariah Posey's personal possession to do as he pleased with, and he usually pleased to let it run on ahead while he loitered by the wayside.

"Not so early as it might be," said Mr. Goodman. "It's all of seven o'clock. Sammy here overslept considerably. You are helping me today, are n't you, neighbor?"

He was now entirely satisfied with the condition of the harness, but Mr. Posey still leaned against the wheel, and courtesy forbade driving off under the circumstances.

"I 'lowed to putt in the day huntin' till I recollected that you was thrashin' ter-day. Me an' Zack 'll both be up ter lend a hand. You kakin' ter pack the wheat from over yander on Halstead's bottom this mornin'?"

"Yes, and, as it's getting pretty late, I reckon we'd better be moving on. We must finish this job before the pesky rains begin again."

He put his foot suggestively on the opposite

wheel and Posey regretfully straightened himself.

"I jist met Halstead yander ter the cross-roads," he said, in his slow, drawling voice. "I 'low ther 'll be trouble yit over that there wheat, Mr. Goodman. He says ter me ter say ter you that if you teched ary bundle on his place, ther 'd be trouble sure. If I was you I would pack along that old revolver of yourn."

Goodman's jaws came together with a little snap, but he only said, mildly, "Oh, he won't do anything rash, I reckon. He knows as well as I do how unreasonable his claim is. He would n't dare to push it. However, I 'm all ready to thrash and I 'm going to thrash. Wait a minute, Sammy, I want to get a drink of water."

He went into the house and took a long drink.

"Well, we 're off," he said, turning toward his wife as he reached the open doorway. "I am afraid we shall have trouble with Hank, but I do n't suppose it will be anything serious."

"If there is the least likelihood of trouble, for pity's sake, Gerry, leave the old wheat alone. There is n't enough of it to quarrel over, goodness knows, and I do hate a neighborhood row of all things! I 've always preached how easy it was to live at peace with one 's neighbors if one would just show a little common sense, and neither gush at the beginning nor back-bite to

finish off with — just keep dignified. Now, let 's do a little practicing. Besides, I do n't like Hank Halstead. I do n't trust him. He 's as likely to do a mean trick as any man I know, though goodness knows I have no call to say so. He never hurt me or mine by word or deed."

"And he won't today," said Goodman, confidently. "He would n't dare. And as there is a little matter of principle involved, much more important to me than the worth of the grain, we 'll just settle the question right now and get back to our old footing."

He left the room, climbed into his place beside Sammy, Posey clambered up behind, and the heavy wagon creaked out of the barnyard and down the lane through the sweet-smelling, drowsy morning air. They crossed the creek, now subsided into its normal shallow course, and entered the field. Halstead was there and he came forward at once.

"Did you get my message?" he asked, abruptly, without greeting.

"Howdy," responded Mr. Goodman, genially, as he jumped lightly to the ground. "Fine weather for thrashing, eh, Hank? About time, too. Yes, I got your fool message — I knew you were only bluffing me, though. We 've been neighbors too long for a real rumpus. 'Light, boys, and load 'er up. Time 's passing."

"I 'll shoot the first man who touches a bundle of that wheat," said Hank, unexpectedly, and with a deliberateness that was plainly forced. Dark circles under his gleaming eyes gave evidence of a sleepless night of brooding.

"Oh, come now, neighbor," said Goodman, soothingly, "you know you 'll do nothing of the kind. You 've no call to talk that way. A contract 's a contract, you know."

"Contract or no contract, I mean what I say!" cried Hank, violently. "You 'd better look out, Mr. Goodman. You 've been warned, and warned a' plenty!"

"Shucks! As Mr. Goodman says, you ain't got no call ter talk that air way, Hank," vouchsafed Posey, loyal to the best friend he had on Crooked Creek. His shock of blonde, sun-bleached hair was singularly like Zack's, and his good-natured face was expressionless with a little too much placidity, but the eyes were friendly and trusting. No one could really dislike Zachariah Posey, although many could rage at the childlike irresponsibility which could forget a thrashing engagement, for instance, in order to spend a long, beautiful day tramping through the woods with his gun over his shoulder. "Everybody knows the rights o' this here case. What you want ter go an' git folks down on you fer?"

"You keep out o' this, Posey, will you?" snarled Halstead. "You're nothin' but Gerry Goodman's puppy dog, anyhow, glad to be kicked any and all times just so you can keep jumpin' round his feet. I do n't want to hear another word out o' you!"

"Well, I, for one, have n't time to waste arguing this little difference all morning," broke in Mr. Goodman, losing his patience. "You can't bluff me, Halstead, and you know it. Take your troubles to court if you are n't satisfied. All hands to work! Hop lively, Sammy! Now then!"

As he spoke, he pitched a bundle of wheat into the wagon. Long afterwards, Sammy remembered that the vigorous action sent a flock of blackbirds screaming away, but it made no impression upon him then. He was gazing fascinated upon Hank Halstead's livid face.

Quick as thought, without a word of warning, Hank stepped forward and struck Goodman full in the face. There followed a breathless moment of waiting, during which time, the look of absolute surprise in the assaulted man's kindly countenance gave place to one of quick resentment and of immediate purpose. As has been before stated, he was, physically, Halstead's superior to an eminent degree. It was as if a fox terrier had snapped into the face of a huge

mastiff. His fork fell to the ground. Even then, he was not so angry as he had been when Halstead intimated that he was no better than a thief; but he turned upon his assailant, lifted his great arm and struck a blow that hurled the smaller man against the side of the wagon.

Hank began to curse, babbling out profanity rapidly, without pause, in an expressionless way, as if he were beside himself and knew not that he was articulating words. He had not before shown a weapon. No one had really believed he carried one. Hank Halstead had always been a talker rather than a doer. Now, however, a revolver flashed out suddenly from somewhere, and he fired twice in rapid succession. The range was pitifully close. Again came the fleeting look of questioning surprise in Mr. Goodman's face — then he sank to the ground without a murmur. It was very still for a moment in the yellow-stubbed field. No one spoke or moved.

"God!" said Halstead, then, in a low voice. He turned suddenly like some wild creature at bay. The woods, the great, the ancient, the concealing woods were not far away. They circled the little clearing in dark, crowding phalanxes. Their colors were splendid on this fair September morning of after frost, but he saw only the welcome gloom of their inner fastnesses and he turned to flee — to hide himself there. Posey

read his intention and sprang forward in pursuit, but the man, with an ugly, "No, you do n't," turned to shoot as he ran, and Posey stopped in his tracks. He was unhurt but one of the straying bullets found lodgment in the brown, chubby calf of Sammy's leg, and the boy sank to the ground, white-faced, wild-eyed, but too wrought up to feel pain or to realize his condition.

He crawled over to the motionless figure by the wagon, hoping that his father had followed Posey's advice and procured the revolver when he had gone into the house after a drink. He felt through his clothing but there was no revolver there. By the time he had completed his search, Halstead had disappeared into the forest.

The other helpers who had been at the thrashing floor and who had heard the shots now came hurrying up. In the quiet of that death which is too sudden and solemn for vain questioning or idle speculation, with awe-stricken faces, tenderly they lifted the body of their neighbor and friend and placed it carefully in the wagon; then they turned to Sammy. His wound was not serious but it was bleeding profusely. He did not seem to realize it.

"He killed pap," he whispered, strangely. "I would have killed him for it if pap had had the revolver. Mr. Posey told him he had better take it and I thought he had it."

Suddenly catching sight of the blood, the flow of which they were endeavoring to stop, he began to sob convulsively. The men bound up his wound and laid him beside his father, still in that silence which a great shock brings, when discussion of it is so inadequate as to seem mere peevishness babbled in the inscrutable face of Infinity; and the wagon, weighted with its burden so much more precious than all the golden wheat of all the world that it would seem as if God himself must wonder at the quarrels of men, creaked its slow way back to the little "hewed log" cabin where a stony-faced woman with two baby girls clinging to her skirts awaited its coming.

While it was on its dreary journey, one neighbor hastened away for the doctor, another for the sheriff. The physician and the officer of the law arrived at the cabin at the same time, but while one felt for the heart of the murdered man and then turned sadly away to minister to the white-faced boy, the other stepped outside, followed by Posey and all those other stern-faced men who were beginning now to find their voices and to fix their single purpose on the grim duty which lay before them.

"Who will go?" asked the sheriff, briefly, and to a man, they answered, "I!"

But though the volunteer posse searched the

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murderer's premises diligently, scoured the woods in all directions, visited the neighboring farms, nor rested that day nor for many another, the whispering forest kept its secret.

CHAPTER IV

FOR THE HONOR OF "PAP"

EVER since Sammy could remember anything, he had simply worshiped his father; but since a certain election a few years before when he had been allowed to accompany "pap" to his voting precinct, this unreasoning and matter-of-course adoration had taken on color and understanding until he began frankly and even generously, in his large, somewhat lofty way, to pity fellows who did not have Gerry Goodman for their father. At this election, a man had presumed to strike his father in the heat of a political argument, and he had seen his father knock the fellow down as calmly and easily as if it were an every day occurrence, and then walk quietly away without waiting to see whether or not the man wished to continue the quarrel. It was over so far as he was concerned. He had obtained satisfaction for an insult. What more was there to be said or done? Surely, thought Sammy, there never was another man so big and brave and strong as his father. Other boys have thought the same thing throughout all the ages, with more or less reason and with more or less

intensity, but Sammy believed it with all his heart and soul. Even when a man grown, having met and known well many of the great men whom the stress of his day and generation brought forth, he never ceased to cherish, in the sacred places of the soul, the thought that his father had been great, too. This father's having died young, in the full flush of his sensitive small son's passionate hero worship, before it was sullied in the least by doubt or comparison which might have come in after years, even though unjustly, invested his memory with a peculiar sacredness and a faith as unswerving in Sammy, the man, as was that of the boastful boy who was wont many a time to brag importantly "Pap could lick him!"

Yes, Sammy Goodman was sure "pap" could lick any man in the county, and woe betide the luckless boy who essayed to admire a little too freely some other man who was supposed to be a great fighter. Sammy was n't much of a fighter himself and never began combat, but the fear of his tongue was a potent force which usually kept him free from such entanglements. He could be mightily sarcastic for a small boy, and few of his mates held out very long when it came to a question of Sammy's talk. They generally withdrew all claims in confusion, so it soon became an easy matter for him to establish and maintain his father's reputation in the boy world.

It was not only on account of the superiority of his physical strength, however, that Sammy had placed his father on so high a pedestal. He also knew everything. Now, Gerry Goodman was probably the most learned man in the neighborhood, and was rather scholarly for his time; but he doubtless had his mental limitations, which boundaries, however, Sammy never discovered. It was a proud moment for the boy when some neighbor came to the cabin for information. Such instances were not at all uncommon, for Gerry Goodman, with all his learning, had the kindly and understanding heart that won the confidence of at least the majority of his neighbors.

And now that this hero father was gone — gone in the prime of his vigorous manhood and fatherhood — what human understanding could fathom the depth of the woe to Sammy? Well for him that the exigencies of the family's situation gave him little time to brood; for his was the temperament that melancholy lies in wait for — ardent, studious, sensitive, thoughtful. But, lying on pap's and mam's bed downstairs where he could the more easily be waited upon during the healing of his wound; watching his stricken-faced mother going heavily, but conscientiously, about the multitudinous tasks inside and out which were now forced upon her; thinking long and long, with thoughts suddenly grown old, of the

future of the little sisters, now prattling gayly in their play around the room, now weeping inconsolably for the big pap who was never there at bedtime any more to ride them on his knees while they waited in an ecstasy of palpitating, delicious hysteria for the moment when "the horse fell into a big hole"; seeing and thinking all these things, Sammy Goodman received light to realize the magnitude of his new responsibility and strength to fight off, during the long nights of his pain and sleeplessness, the spirit of melancholy which had brooded so long and threateningly around his bed.

He was so healthy and clean-blooded that his wound healed quickly; but it was while he still lay upon the bed in the "sitting room" that Herbert came in one day to talk things over. He was not so much older than Sammy, after all, and Sammy was the stronger in leadership. Herbert had never taken to the work on the little farm. He dreamed dreams of the University and a career in medicine. The thought of suffering and death was peculiarly abhorrent to him — not so much as a personal matter but just, Why should they be? Perhaps, all unconsciously, the ghosts of those old expositions of hell and damnation were still shuddering through his sensibilities. However that may be, he went on dreaming, even now when he must be the man

of the family, of men whose calling it was to heal and to save.

"The Poseys are here, Sammy," he said. "They want to know if we are going to thrash that grain. Zack and his dad will both ride all day for us if we decide to do it. They've been mighty good to us."

"I hope God will give me strength and sense never to call Mis' Posey shiftless and no-count again," put in Mrs. Goodman, in stern self-accusation, as she brought a bowl of steaming broth to the bedside and sat down to help the invalid with his breakfast. "One never can tell. I dare-say I'll be just low-down mean enough to be doing it in a month from now — but I hope not. She never had time for anything, not even for combing her children's hair, or her own either, for that matter, and I've thought a many an unkind thing about her for that — but I notice that she has time to take care of my babies when I'm strapped for time, and to comb their hair, too, and time to make chicken broth for Sammy, using her own pullets, too, when goodness knows she has n't any to spare. I *hope* I've learned my lesson — though one never can tell."

"Of course we'll thrash that wheat," cried Sammy, red spots beginning to burn bright on his white cheeks. "The sooner the better. Good for old Zack! I knew he'd help us out!"

"But — what 'll we do with it?" asked Herbert, doubtfully. "I 'd rather just leave it alone, would n't you? Nobody wants it — now."

"I do. I want our share and I'm going to have it!" cried Sammy, in a loud voice, and his eyes began to shine so unnaturally that Mrs. Goodman looked warningly at her older son.

"And — what —" said Herbert, hesitatingly, "shall we do with the rest? Posey says for us to keep it."

"Haul it over to Halsteads', of course," said Sammy, excitedly. "It is n't ours."

"But he has gone away, you know. He will never come back for it. He will not dare!"

"I do n't care," cried Sammy, feverishly, "you haul that wheat over to Halstead's and you put it in his granary. It must n't stay on this place. It's — it's — bloody. Thrash it and take it away, Herb, take it away — but you leave pap's share. It's white and clean. You leave it here, I say!"

He pushed out his hands a little wildly so that the hot soup splashed on to the bed — then he turned his face to the wall.

And so the grain was thrashed, and the bloody half of it hauled over to Hank Halstead's and stored in his granary; but never a sight of the man himself did any one catch during the transaction.

When the harvest was well over and Sammy's wound had healed, he went back to school, he and Zack; but he was changed. His responsibilities weighed upon him — tangible responsibilities now, far different from the vague, visionary ones of the dreamer who had loitered on the way to school in the early morning of a day in the fall of the year. Often, when he seemed to be laboring with his books — being always quiet and thoughtful — he was thinking more than he was studying, thinking his own thoughts and not those of the printed page. Sometimes, the tears would suddenly steal down his face. At such times, Zack knew, and so did Mary Ann Hamilton, that he was thinking of his father and not of the intricacies of some problem in the book, and both in their childish way tried to show their affection, their sympathy, and their loyalty.

A nephew of Hank Halstead's attended the Crooked Creek school. It was during the noon hour one day in early winter when Sammy had scudded home immediately after dismissal, as he always did now, there was so much to do there, that a number of the boys gathered around this nephew — curiosity and interest in no way dimmed by the passage of time — and began to discuss the murder in much the same manner as they heard it still discussed every night around the fireplaces in their own homes. They were so

intent upon expressing their own young opinions and in drawing out Bob Halstead's views on the subject that no one noticed when Sammy again slipped into the room.

"Well, I will say this," Bob was saying, "nobody need think it was all Uncle Hank's fault. Old Goodman was just trying his dead level best to steal that there wheat by some hook or crook, and when he saw he could n't bluff Uncle Hank, he up and hit him right in the face — a mighty dirty, low, mean trick, takin' a man by surprise that-a-way. I 'low there ain't ary Halstead goin' to stand for no sichy doin's as that air. And then he grabbed the pitchfork and would have killed Uncle Hank for sure if Uncle Hank had n't a shot him first. If fightin' with a pitchfork ain't the orneriest kind o' fightin', I do n't know what is! But old man Goodman always was a low-down, ornery, quarrelsome, mischief-makin' feller. That's what pap always said, and I reckon he knew what he was talkin' about."

Mary Ann Hamilton, who, with other girls, had drawn near to listen, with palpitating hearts, felt something suddenly smarting in her honest brown eyes, and, in that moment, some part of her extreme, non-reasoning, non-discriminating bashfulness fell away from her and left her the stronger forevermore. This call to her child-

ish loyalty and honor had come to her with such sudden and compelling force that it had to be answered right then. There was no other way. She never could have been so bold for herself — but having forgotten herself in the supreme moment, she was very bold indeed, though her cheeks burned, her eyes were swimming in tears, and her cotton handkerchief was a crushed ball in her tightly clinched little brown fist.

"You would n't dast to say that if Sammy were here!" she cried passionately. "You know you would n't. You're afraid of him, and besides you know it is n't true — what you said. If it is true, what is your uncle hiding for? Why does n't he give himself up like a man and prove he is innocent? It's 'cause he knows he's a murderer and he's afraid and you know it, too, that's why, and he was a coward to shoot a boy! You would n't dast to say a word if Sammy were here! You know that, too!"

"Oh, I 'lowed you 'd stand up for Goodman on Sammy's account," said Bob, with a disagreeable grin, as he winked knowingly at the boys. "Everybody knows you're in love with him. If you were n't a girl, though, I 'd slap your face for calling me a liar, you see if I would n't!"

Sammy stepped forward. His face was white, his eyes snapped fire. A sudden swift silence fell

upon the little group. The boys involuntarily backed away while the girls stared wide-eyed and fascinated. Something was going to happen.

"I'm not a girl, Bob Halstead," said Sammy, quietly, "and I will call you the same thing she did, only in plainer words. You are a liar and a coward!"

"Oh, I am, am I? You just come out doors and I'll show you whether I'm a coward or not — if you dast!" cried Bob, loudly, blusteringly.

Without a word, Sammy turned and left the room. Bob followed him, and by far the greater number of excited pupils trooped after the combatants. The schoolmaster had not yet returned from dinner. His present boarding place being within walking distance, he always availed himself of the opportunity to slip away, even for this brief time, from the confusion and restlessness of the noisy pioneer school.

The boys were evenly matched, nearly of the same age, both healthy, husky, farmer lads — although there were those who feared for Sammy because of the gunshot wound which had kept him confined for so many days. The two stepped up to each other and the rest immediately formed a ring around them, boy fashion. Sammy maintained the fixed, determined look which had been there since his entrance upon the scene, and had spoken no word since his quiet challenge. Bob

Halstead, on the contrary, talked loudly, abusively, threateningly, as if, perchance, to over-awe his antagonist, or perhaps to duly impress the other fellows, the most of whose sympathies, he felt, instinctively, were with the boy whose father had been murdered. He was evidently laboring under great excitement. He made the first aggressive movement, wading into the conflict at once. Sammy was more cautious. For a long time, he kept himself on the defensive. It began to look as if he never would start in earnest. The spectators began to wonder. Was he afraid? Was he feeling the weakness of his wound more than any one had realized? It was a damp day with a feeling of snow in the air, but already the perspiration was rolling down young Halstead's flushed face with the violence of his aggressive warfare. His friends thought that he had already won. They began to yell their encouragement and to hoot at the "easiness" of the vanquished. Fired by these sounds of acclamation and mistaking Sammy's continued defensive tactics for cowardice, Bob's bravado rose in proportion to his leaping sense of speedy victory.

"Aw, come up and fight like a man!" he cried, tauntingly. "I hain't got time to follow you up all over this here county!"

As if Sammy had been waiting for this taunt

to usher in the psychological moment, he now stepped forward quickly and struck his antagonist full in the face. It might have been that he was thinking of a blow this boy's uncle had given his father in a wheat field on a fair morning of after-frost. Something put a great and unexpected and stinging force into that blow of Sammy's, so it might very well have been that memory. Bob cried aloud in the quick pain and surprise of this unlooked-for development.

"You will, will you, dod rot your ornery, measly, sneakin' hide!" he shrilled, in rage, and leaped upon Sammy in deadly earnest.

Sammy was ready for the onslaught, however, and now the blows fell thick and fast, with the advantage seemingly on neither side. Soon, both noses were bleeding, eyes were swollen, and lips cut. The nerve the two boys displayed was astonishing. This was no child's play. Neither dreamed of crying, "Quits!" Finally, however, Sammy succeeded in driving a blow squarely home in the already purple and lumpy face of Bob Halstead which seemed to daze that young game-cock. He staggered, and some of his friends ran to his assistance. Sammy failed to follow up his advantage. He just stood still and waited.

"I hain't licked yit — not by a long shot!" cried Bob, at last, pulling away from the sup-

port of his backers. "Come on, Smarty, come on now! No backin' out! I'm a-goin' to wipe up the ground with you!"

Belligerent in the extreme, the tone and the words; but it was noticed that he himself made no move. The onlookers had all stepped back into their places again, expecting an immediate resumption of hostilities. Suddenly, young Halstead stooped and grabbed up a ball bat with which some of the boys had been playing "two old cat" before the fight had usurped, temporarily, all other interests, and before any one had time to realize the meaning of the swift action, he struck Sammy a blow on the head which doubled him up at once and he sank to the ground, unconscious, a crumpled heap of blue homespun, stout but pitifully still limbs, and white, bloody face.

"Coward! Coward! Shame! Oh, shame! Coward! Coward! Coward!"

The air rang with cries of contempt, horror and condemnation from the throats of the young lovers of fair play on both sides. Some of the older boys rushed in and seized the bat; others hurried to the creek for water and dashed it wildly into Sammy's face. Fortunately, the bat was not a hard one or there would have been another tragedy on Crooked Creek. It was clumsily fashioned from light timber instead of from

well-seasoned wood, as the yarn balls of that day and district required such frail stuff only in the various adaptations of "old cat" and "town ball" which preceded our great national game. Presently, Sammy sat up dizzily, and then stumbled to his feet.

"I'm all right. Let me alone, fellows. Do n't any one come with me," he said, and shuffled unsteadily away towards the woods back of the schoolhouse.

The boys looked at one another questioningly. It seemed an extremely strange request under the circumstances; but they acceded to it and flocked excitedly into the schoolhouse to talk the matter over.

When he had walked some distance into the woods, where it was so dense that the now bared branches and trunks of the trees concealed all glimpse of building or children, Sammy sat down upon a stump and buried his throbbing head in his hands. Oddly enough, his first thoughts after regaining consciousness were not of the physical pain which was racking his body, but were rather a continuation of those with which he had gone into the fray — "He lied about pap. Will any one believe those lies? I've got to make him take them back, or else there'd be somebody who'd believe them. I've got to fight for pap." Now, dizzy, aching, bewildered, he yet was thinking

that he had struck for his father's honor and that surely Bob Halstead's cowardly attack with the bat had only served to crown him, Sammy, victor in the eyes of all his boy world. To fight further would have been folly — mere child's play. He was glad he had not sullied his hands and his own honor by pitching madly into one who did not know the first rudiments of fighting fair. Sometime, he would get even for that blow — but that was a personal affair and could wait. He considered that he had vindicated his father's honor when he had brought that father's vilifier to the pass where he must either give in, like the man he was not, or — grab a ball bat, like the coward he was. But — did any one believe that terrible lie? Not Mary Ann, anyway. Sitting there in the gloom of the chilly woods, he experienced a glow of satisfaction, remembering how she had plucked up courage to tell Bob to his face that he was a liar; and, as he sat there, musing, a timid little hand was laid on his shoulder, and an anxious voice said softly:

"Oh, Sammy, I — I'm so sorry. Are you hurt bad?"

The boy straightened up at once and tried to smile carelessly and indifferently, but his swollen and bleeding face made it but a poor effort and disproved the brave words he spoke.

"Naw! I'm not hurt," he said, but Mary

Ann saw his face fully now for the first time and she gave a little frightened scream.

"Oh, Sammy!" she cried, "your face looks awful! It's all bloody and swollen. Hadn't I better run quick and tell somebody to get the doctor?"

"I should say not!" said Sammy, decidedly. "I'm all right now. I'll go over to the creek and wash my face and then I won't look so bad."

He stumbled to his feet, but he was very weak and his eyes were swollen almost shut so that his progress was rather a blind one. Waiving all her bashfulness again in the pity of her womanly little heart, Mary Ann hastened to his side, slipped her hand into his, and guided him solicitously down to the stream where she sought, found, and placed a small log for him to kneel upon.

"I 'low that was the meanest trick I ever knew any one to play — to up and hit you with a club," she said. "He knew he was whipped, of course, but he ought to o' been satisfied. The boys all think it was *very dishonorable*," she concluded, primly, some of her diffidence running back to her when she saw Sammy emerge from his ablutions looking more natural.

"Do you think any of them believed that lie about pap?" demanded Sammy, quickly, scrambling to his feet and wiping his face with his handkerchief. That last phrase of the girl's was

infinitely soothing to his bruised spirit. He was very grateful, but he did not know how to say so.

"No, indeed! How could they?" declared Mary Ann, valiantly. "I'm sure they do n't. Not *any* of them! Nobody ever claimed anything like that before. Not any person who was — there ever said anything like that. He just made that up and *nobody* believes it!"

"Good for you, Mary Ann!" was all Sammy found to say, but his poor eyes with the purple bruises smarted with the tears of tenderness that would rise at this brave manifestation of sympathy on the part of his gentle little friend. He was not so very old, you know, and he had been sorely tried of late.

Somebody else was coming. Mary Ann's quick woods ears caught the sound of approaching footsteps and she glided away. She need not have been afraid. It was only Zack — faithful Zack.

"Hello!" he cried, when he saw Sammy sitting on the bank of the creek. "I been lookin' all over for you. How do you feel?"

"I do n't feel very well," replied Sammy, listlessly.

"I do n't wonder! That certainly was the orneriest, lowest-down trick I ever see played in all my hull life. All the fellers are down on him for it. You'd better come along, though. It

air schooltime, an' if we do n't hurry right smart we 'll git a lickin'. I reckon you 'll git one anyhow for fightin'. Say, let 's you an' me jist make off fer home. You do n't deserve that lickin' no more'n nothin' an' maybe old Mitchell will cool down some when he hears the straight of it."

This then was the faithful Zack's errand — and he would go with him and take a licking tomorrow for truancy! Good old Zack! But Sammy was too proud to run.

When the boys reached the schoolhouse, the bell had just rung, and the pupils were filing into their places. The master was sitting behind his desk, his usually stern face looking a little sterner, if that were possible. Nobody opened a book, and the shuffling feet were still. The monotony of every day and every day just alike in the little school world had already been broken that day; but there was something more to come. All felt it. Before ever the thrill from the excitement on the playground had time to die away, here was a new, rather a continued, interest. To be sure, "lickin's" were not so uncommon in Crooked Creek schoolhouse; but as the fight had been an unusual one, so the expectation was that its aftermath would be an unusual licking.

"Robert Halstead and Samuel Goodman will come forward!" said the master, in a loud, rasping voice which boded ill for the delinquents.

The two went forward.

"Take off your jackets!"

They silently removed their jackets.

"Now then!"

He collared Bob first and proceeded to give him such a trouncing as the masters of that day were famous for and which today would seem the very extreme of cruelty and brutishness. Bob howled lustily, wriggling tearfully in the master's iron grasp and begging for mercy; but when Sammy's turn came, he gritted his teeth and took his beating quietly. Perhaps it was laid on him a little harder because of this stubborn silence; but not for the world would he have shown the white feather then. He was in the right. As Zack had said, he did not deserve this licking — therefore, he must take it — quietly. But he could not help wondering if the master was ever going to stop. He began to think that he might die first — he was so very dizzy and had such a strange, unsteady feeling everywhere. It was too bad the new shirt mam had found time to make for him in the midst of all her other trebled duties against the time of his going back to school should be all stained up. He thought that blood was drawn from his back and shoulders at every stroke of the whip. That thought hurt him almost as much as the physical chastisement. But a glimpse of Mary Ann's face as she gazed

blindly out of the window, the big tears streaming down unchecked, steadied him. She would feel very bad if — anything happened to him — and she must never know how near he came to screaming aloud just then when the cruel lash fell upon an already quivering bruise.

“Now,” said the master, when at last he desisted, from exhaustion rather than from inclination, it is to be feared, “I reckon you boys won’t fight again in a hurry, will you? What did you say?”

“No, sir,” whimpered Bob.

“What did you say, Sammy?”

“I did n’t say anything,” said Sammy, shortly.

“I thought I did n’t hear you,” said the master.

“Well, what do you say now?”

“I say I will fight any one at any time who talks about my father as Bob Halstead did,” said Sammy, deliberately.

The school gasped.

“Oh, you will, will you?” cried the master, with an ugly smile. His discipline was in danger and that would never do. He grasped the whip more firmly than ever and laid his hand on the boy’s shoulder.

“Now, what do you say? Yes or no?”

“Yes.”

The lash descended with renewed vigor.

“Now?”

"Yes."

Again the lash. Sammy grew paler and paler. His eyes were becoming glazed. He was trembling all over.

"Got enough?" asked the master.

The boy deigned no answer.

Suddenly, Zachariah Posey stood up. His round, chubby face was almost as white as Sammy's.

"I 'low he won't fight no more," he stammered, confused by the astonished attention he was getting. "I promise for him. He 's sick an' he do n't any more know what he 's a-sayin' than a baby. You quit now! Sammy won't fight if I say he won't. Sammy an' me's always been friends. He hain't right strong yit from his gunshot."

"Yes, I will, too, fight — if I have to, Zack," said Sammy, resolutely repudiating the friend's well-meant promise, but flashing an understanding and a grateful smile at the friend.

There was another hard, telling blow, and then something in the deathly pallor of the boy's face, and an odd drooping of the figure, combined with a look of absolute unconquerableness in the swollen eyes, frightened the master and stayed his hand.

"That will do for the present," he said, briefly. "Go to your seat. I trust you will be in a better

frame of mind tomorrow," and, being still a little perturbed when he saw the utter weakness and weariness of Sammy as the boy stumbled to his seat, he forgot to administer the whipping to Zack which he had fully meant to give when he was listening to the boy's insolent plea for Sammy.

"What will mam say?" was Sammy's troubled thought as he trudged wearily home from school late that afternoon. His mother had ever been a stricter disciplinarian than his father. A whipping at school often meant another at home. But when he told her about it, she only said, and there was a strange gentleness in her voice:

"Yes, I know all about it. Mary Ann stopped in and told me."

Then she busied herself in applying soothing lotions to his bruises, put him to bed, and went out in the gathering dusk to do his chores herself.

CHAPTER V

TREEING A COON

SAMMY had but just fallen asleep — so he thought — when he was awakened by an excited whisper.

“Sammy! Sammy! Sammy Goodman! Wake up quick! Prince has treed a coon!”

In reality, he had been deeply slumbering for several hours, as it was now nearly three o'clock of a dark, chill morning in late fall, a year after the tragic death of Gerry Goodman; and, although he and Zack had visited together rather a long time, with their heads under the patchwork quilts to prevent Herbert's catching the gist of their whisperings, as well as to protect themselves from any stray pillows which might descend upon them suddenly from out the dark of the elder brother's place and cot on the other side of the room, as a gentle reminder that the night was made for slumber, eight o'clock had found them safely in bed and presumably asleep. Candles must not be wantonly wasted in that thrifty household — especially now that the supply was so sadly diminished, lacking the wherewithal, since Gerry Goodman had gone away. It was

one of those rare nights when, as an especial treat, Zack had been allowed to spend it with Sammy; but there was no sleep so deep, except the final one, that could shut out the sound of his much loved dog's voice from the young master's ears. Prince was shaggy and mongrel but he was the best 'coon dog in the country, at least he was in Zack's estimation, and, without doubt, he did have a keen scent for that sagacious little animal. Both Zacks would have staked all they possessed — which, in truth, was not much — upon his absolute infallibility where coons were concerned.

"I tell you, Prince has treed a coon!" repeated Zack, impatient at Sammy's unexpected unresponsiveness.

"How do you know?" asked Sammy, sleepily.

"Do n't you hear him?" demanded Zack, for once assuming the initiative, scrambling out of bed and pulling on his trousers, far too excited to heed the damp coldness of the room.

"Let him bark," said Sammy, indifferently, pulling the bed clothes closer around him as he felt the chill settling down into Zack's vacated place. "Likely he's only baying at the moon, anyway." He snuggled down closer in the warm bed and prepared to drift off again into dreamless slumber.

"Huh!" exclaimed Zack, resentfully, "I 'low Prince has got more sense 'n ter bark at the moon

— specially when it 's way over in Chiny an' it 's as dark out as a stack o' black cats. There can't nobody fool me on Prince's bark. I 'low I'd oughter know. He 's my dawg. 'T ain't very far, nuther, an' I 'm a-goin' ter git that air coon if you ain't. So there!"

It was a long speech for Zack, but the dear topic of his coon dog inspired it. He continued his dressing doggedly. He was much hurt at Sammy's indifference.

"I do n't care if Prince has treed forty coons, I ain't going to get up at this time of night. What did you wake me up for, anyway? I 'm dead asleep. Come back to bed and wait till morning. Do act with some sense!"

"You 'll be sorry in the mornin', when it 's too late," said Zack, conclusively. "I woke you 'cause I thought you had some spunk."

A daring thrust, this, for Zack, but somehow Sammy was n't so awe-inspiring when he was huddled up in the middle of the bed, and it was very dark besides, and Prince's far away but insistent barking excited him and made him feel strangely independent. He groped for the landing.

"What you going to do?" demanded Sammy, wide awake at last, and sitting up suddenly.

"I 'm a-goin' ter git that air coon," said Zack, with dignity.

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"What you young 'uns up to, anyway?" cried a voice from the opposite corner, husky with sleepy indignation. "Get into bed and shut up. 'T ain't near time to get up yet," and, turning over, Herbert was asleep again.

"Wait for me, Zack," whispered Sammy, much excited now that he was thoroughly aroused. "I'm going, too."

"You'll have to hurry a right smart then," returned Zack, only half mollified at this tardy response.

"Sh — sh — ! We must n't wake mam nor the girls!"

Sammy dressed quickly and the two boys crept down the stairs on tiptoe and opened the door softly. It was very dark. There was as yet no hint of dawn. It almost seemed, so dense was the blackness, that it could be cut with a knife. Prince's persistent, triumphant barking, however, was reassuring and their companionship made them temporarily bold. Most young people of that day and neighborhood, nor was it always confined to the young, by any means, cherished a belief in "hants," a half belief by day, but a good whole one by night, and this faith was none the less sincere because more often than not it was unconfessed, and even wordily repudiated, when occasion demanded. But both lads silently braced themselves with the thought that ghosts seldom.

if ever, manifested themselves to more than one person at a time. Verily, in union there is strength. And then, as they rather breathlessly followed the sound of the distant baying of the hound over toward Halstead's woods, the late moon, dissipated looking and far on the wane, slipped into the sky. They breathed more freely. But once in the deep woods where the weird moonlight did not penetrate, and where the darkness was so still that the pumping of their hearts sounded like the beat of drums, and the rustle of a fallen leaf underfoot caused them to clutch each other convulsively, they experienced a demoralizing sense of "creepiness," and instinctively crept closer together, listening to the awful stillness which ruled the forest except for the barking of the excited dog, which is always a mournful sound at night, even when it signifies a treed coon, and for the faint stirring of the woods folk which was fraught with so much of mystery to the imaginations of Sammy and Zack.

It was a vast relief to finally find the dog, barking vociferously at the foot of a small Jack Oak tree, and they sat down close beside him, glad of his company and courageously resolving to stay there until daylight, when Mr. Raccoon would be an easy target for the old squirrel rifle. Prince understood and crouched at their feet. The need for voicing the fact of his find was no more, but

he was keenly and constantly on the alert, nevertheless, to prevent the coon's giving them the slip.

Would daylight never come? Would the night never lift itself from the clinging woods and melt away into nothingness? What would they do if they should suddenly hear the snarl of a "painter" about to spring, and should catch the gleam of its fiery eyes from out the dark? At first, the boys had been too excited to get drowsy; now, as the excitement abated and the weirdness and mystery of the night crept around them, touched them, enfolded them, dominated them, craven fear took its place, combated sleepiness and conquered.

"Sammy, do n't you believe in hants — really and truly?" asked Zack, in an awed whisper.

"Naw! I should say I do n't," replied Sammy, in a rather shaky voice, but with a vast assumption of well-grounded faith in what he said and of scouting ridicule of Zack's suggestion.

"I 've heard tell a passel o' times that there was hants in these here woods. Folks has seen 'em."

"I do n't believe it. Just lies. They wanted to make a sensation, or else they were so scared themselves that they saw creatures of the imagination," said Sammy, grandiloquently, though his heart was beating like a trip-hammer. "I

do n't believe there 's ary a hant this side of Kingdom Come."

"Folks do say these here woods is hanted by your pap's ghost," persisted Zack. "Heaps o' folks hereabouts have seen it, Sammy, an' 'lowed it resembled your pap a right smart. They've heerd strange noises, too, a passel o' times, an' seen lights a-flittin' about — maybe right here — oh, Gawd, Sammy," he broke off, suddenly, while his chubby, tow-crowned face went pale in the dark, "let 's go back!"

"'T was n't anything but dry leaves rustling," protested Sammy, determined to stick it out, since he had come, until — well, until no mortal man could bear it longer. His heart had jumped, too, at the sound of the faint but unmistakable rustling of leaves, but he was not completely routed yet.

"What made 'em rustle, Sammy?" quavered Zack.

"I dunno, squirrel maybe, or a mouse, or a snake, or a stray cow — maybe the wind 's getting up." He was valiantly striving to prop up his own courage.

"Sounded like somebody walkin' — there 't is agin," gasped the now demoralized Zack.

"Ghosts do n't walk," said Sammy, trying to take comfort to himself in the statement. "They just float through the air."

"But I thought you did n't believe in 'em," cried Zack, completely terror-stricken. He had so depended upon Sammy's large and comfortable unbelief.

"I meant, of course, if there were ghosts, which there are n't. I wish it was pap. I would n't be afraid of his ghost. Maybe he'd tell me where to find Hank Halstead. Maybe that's what he comes here for — if he comes — to tell somebody —"

"Look at Prince!" interrupted Zack, hoarsely.

The dog was moving restlessly; and now the sound of the rustling leaves was continuous and was coming nearer. Prince growled and his neck bristles stood up. He crept closer to the boys and there was a cowardly droop to his tail. How dark it was under the trees, and even where the moonlight filtered through the open spaces, it was the weird, shadowy, creepy light of a late and waning moon. Nearer and nearer came the sound. It seemed to be approaching them directly. Footsteps! The boys clutched each other in real terror. The dog's low growling became a whine of fear. Terror held them riveted to the spot. They would have run if they had not been too paralyzed with fright to think of it.

"Your — pap — would n't hurt us, would he, Sammy?" quavered Zack, huskily. "Tell him who you are. It's Sammy, Mr. Goodman!"

He tried to call the words aloud, but his voice died in a gasping gurgle of fear.

“Keep still, can’t you?” cautioned Sammy, impatiently. “Did n’t I tell you hants do n’t walk?” He was afraid, too, deathly afraid, but not of the supernatural, now. It was an unearthly hour for human prowlers — he knew that by his own uncanny feeling of out-of-placeness — and it might bode no good for somebody. “Do n’t you dast to speak out loud! Sh! Sh!” He put a quieting hand on Prince’s head.

Nearer — nearer — nearer — straight toward them came the rustling footsteps. The boys scarcely breathed. When perhaps twenty feet from the unsuspected Jack Oak, beneath which crouched and trembled two blanched-faced boys and a drooping-tailed dog, and in whose branches clung with a sharp and watchful eye and a beating heart the raccoon of their desire, the footsteps veered off and went toward the bank of Crooked Creek on the right. There was a clearing on the bank at this place and the ghostly moonlight lay quiet upon the ground like a huge sheeted shape asleep. Into this patch of pale light, from out the encircling shadow, stepped a man. He crossed it and disappeared over the bank of the creek.

There was a moment’s breathless pause; then, without a word, the boys rose up and ran. They

ran with all the might they had and the dog followed them. When they were once more safely in bed with the covers pulled up, Zack asked Sammy a question.

“Who was it, Sammy? Did you know him?”

“Yes,” said Sammy, in a strange quiet little voice, not whispering this time. “I knew him. It was Hank Halstead.”

“I ’lowed it were,” said Zack.

Meanwhile, the bright-eyed, wild thing in the Jack Oak tree slipped warily down and was safe.

CHAPTER VI

ZACK BEGINS SEEING THE WORLD

WHEN Zachariah Posey, in early June of '61, sauntered into Mrs. Goodman's kitchen, where that energetic lady was busily engaged in washing the breakfast dishes, he was the same simple-hearted, awkward, chubby, tow-headed, good-natured, easy-going young fellow that he had been in his coon hunting days. Also, he was still Sammy's faithful satellite. Sammy was at the State University and Herbert was in his last year at Rush Medical. How the dreams of the fatherless boys had thus come true was a tale of thrift and economy and self-denial.

"Howdy, Zack," said Mrs. Goodman, without taking her hands from the steaming pan.

"Howdy, Mis' Goodman," said Zack.

"Have a chair. The girls are out feeding the chickens."

"I 'low I hain't got time to set this mornin'. I heerd Sammy was comin' home right away an' I 'lowed I'd come over ter ask you about 'n it. Is it true?"

"Yes, he's coming tomorrow."

"Well, I declar'! It 'll sure be nice ter have

him home ag'in won't it? Schoolin's a lonesome business, ain't it, Mis' Goodman? You goin' ter Lagoottee or air the girls agoin'?"

"Why, to tell the truth, Zack," said Mrs. Goodman, "I had planned on going myself. But it is hard for me to get away, there is so much to tend to with the boys gone, and the girls are no account at all left to do things alone, and yet I dislike to have them go alone to Lagoottee. I just happened to think, as you came in, why could n't you go?"

"Why, I'd like ter go powerful well, Mis' Goodman. I hain't never been ter Lagoottee, but I 'low I kin find the way."

"You can take the old carry-all, and the girls can go along for company. You'll have to start real early in the morning, for it's twenty miles, and bad roads. The train gets in at about seven o'clock in the evening, so you will have to stay all night and start back the next day. Sammy'll show you where to go," concluded Mrs. Goodman, scrubbing the rough boards of her kitchen table vigorously.

"I never saw a train o' keers in my life," said Zack, a far-away look in his eyes. "I 'low I'll be purt' nigh skert ter death when they come a-rollin' in. I hain't seen much for a boy o' my age, have I?"

"No, you have n't, Zack, that's very true.

But you are about to make a good beginning and you 'll likely see a great deal before you are through with life."

"I 'low I will, if I go ter the war."

"Why, Zack, you are n't thinking seriously of going, are you?" Mrs. Goodman laid down her scrubbing brush and turned to the boy, a look of surprise on her already lined but still attractive face.

"I be," responded Zack, placidly. "Aleck Moses air a-gittin' up a company now over yander ter Jasper."

"But you are n't old enough! You are only a boy! War is for men, Zack, it 's a man's game. Oh, surely, God will not ask it of the boys!"

"I 'm eighteen, an' so 's Sammy," said Zack, with unruffled serenity. "I 'd 've 'listed afore only I 've been sort o' waitin' for Sammy. Do you 'low he 'll jine, Mis' Goodman?"

"If it is n't all over before he gets a chance, I suppose he will," replied Mrs. Goodman, shortly, returning to her work with a set face.

"Sammy always was venturesome — and then he 's all his life been carried away by that drunken old Carmichael's fool yarns — God forgive me for calling names now, but it 's true. I suppose that 's what 's ailing you, too, Zack. Well, I should be some worried if I thought this war talk amounted to anything. I 'm only hoping it will

be over before you fool boys get to Jasper, and I'm thinking it will. Sammy can't go till harvest is over."

"Why, Mis' Goodman," cried Zack, consternation in his voice. "You must please let him go before that! Why, I 'low we 'd miss the whole shebang if we waited that long!"

"But you would n't have to wait for Sammy, Zack. If you felt you ought to go, you could go, you know."

"'T would n't be no fun 'thout Sammy," said Zack, simply.

Mollie and Ama Jane had been to the town before and their faces were full of pride as they piloted their big, bashful, homespun friend around the little railroad village snuggling down among the gentle Indiana hills, and they told him over and over again the little they knew, each striving to outdo the other in the telling.

"That there 's the store where Sammy buyed me the candy," cried Ama Jane, her big, dark blue eyes dancing again in mere remembrance of that glorious event which had lightened even the gloom of Sammy's going away to college. Ama Jane had a hero, and that hero was Sammy. She had long ago decided that the man she married must be like Sammy in every particular, even to the trying habit of pulling her small nose and then pretending he had it between his fingers

when everybody knew it was only his thumb. "That there's the very place, Zack!" and she emphasized her information by a coy glance up into his face, rapt and awestruck by the sights of the town. But Mollie, being older and wiser and much, much more practical, knew that it was useless, for even if Zack had understood Ama Jane's longing and artless pleading, she realized that the chances of there being a penny in his pocket were very slight.

"I think it is time to go to the depot," she said, tactfully, to save her friend from the embarrassment of a more direct asking. "We mustn't be late. Whatever would Sammy think?"

"Whereaway is the place where the keers come in at, Mollie?" questioned Zack, with a vague glance around and then above, as if he half expected that they might come shooting across the deep blue of the placid sky and that the filmy white clouds streaking it here and there might be the trail of smoke that they left behind.

"I know," said Ama Jane, eagerly. "It's over thataway. That big house over there — see it, Zackie? That's it — that's the depot where Sammy'll get off at."

"Oh, no, Ama Jane," said Mollie, gently. "I think Sammy said that was the hotel — the place where folks stay, you know, when they're traveling and have n't anywhere else to stay — no

friends' or relations' houses to stop at. That's the depot over there, I think; that long, low building. Let's go there now."

"That air one over yander ain't so big as the other one, though, Mollie," ventured Zack, more than half inclined to agree with the younger sister. "Mebbe Ama Jane's right. That air's a powerful big buildin'. Do n't you 'low the keers would come in at the biggest place, Mollie?"

"It does look bigger," said Mollie, unconvinced, "but the other one spreads out more, and then I seem to remember that we went down that way when we came with Sammy. Besides, I do n't see anything that looks like railroad tracks only down there."

"Sure enough," agreed Zack, a little crest-fallen that the place where the wonderful cars came in was not the biggest building in town. "Let's go there, then."

And so the evening, the early evening of southern Indiana, with its low sun, its quiet, and its warm, dreamy atmosphere through which sound carried with singular distinctness, found the little sisters of Sammy Goodman with their open-mouthed but stanch friend, Zack Posey, on the plank platform of the little station at Lagoot-tee, waiting for the first whistle of the wonderful, wonderful thing called a train. When it sounded, long and shrill, the warning signal found Zack

utterly unprepared for it, after all. A paleness crept into his round, brown face. Fear shot into his big, light eyes.

"Wha — what — was that?" he gasped, and, before his question could be answered, knew, and blushed for his unsophistication, but forgot it the next moment when he caught sight of a seething column of black smoke rising above the tops of the trees straight into the still evening air, but leaving a long, horizontal track in its wake. Mollie was not to be denied her opportunity, however.

"Why, that's it," she said, importantly. "What did you think it was — a hant? You looked that scared, Zack!"

But Zack did not hear, for at that moment the train itself rounded the curve and came speeding down the straight track toward them. His chin dropped, his eyes widened, his arms hung loosely at his sides. This was Zachariah Posey's first step into the wider world of which every youth dreams. In the wonder of it all, he did not remember what he was standing there for, until a familiar hand was laid on his shoulder and a familiar voice cried, heartily:

"Hello, there, Zack! What are you dreaming about?"

"Why, howdy; I purt' nigh forgot you was comin', I got so *interested* in watchin' the keers

come in. That air 's quite a machine, Sammy. I wish I could take a ride on it. I 'low it would be powerful *interestin'*."

"Well, when you go to the war, you 'll get your chance, I reckon — for of course you 're going, Zack?"

"You bet I be. I 've jist been a-waitin' for you ter git home. You know Aleck Moses is organizin' a company an' we kin jine right away."

"But mam says Sammy can't go until after corn-shuckin' time," objected Mollie, the caretaker, gazing at her tall brother with adoring blue eyes. They were a blue-eyed race, the Goodmans.

"Well, we 'll decide that later," laughed Sammy. "Come, let us to the sign of the Buffalo Head and stay our stomachs without further delay. I 'm hungry as a bear."

Mollie looked at him in quiet and approving surprise.

This was a new Sammy, this tall, well-dressed, new-speaking, laughing brother, home from the great University of the great State of Indiana, once thought of and talked of as but a fabled dream. Sammy was not so very well-dressed. At least, he was not considered as a specially good dresser among the students in Bloomington; but he wore store clothes now which shone quite resplendent beside Zack's homespun, and he had

an easy way in them which made him appear much better dressed than he really was. He was clad like a king in the eyes of Mollie and Ama Jane.

“That certainly is a right smart of a machine,” said Zack, leaving the platform regretfully, in tow of Sammy. He looked back over his shoulder several times as they walked down the shaded street to which the early dusk had come. “It certainly is. I wonder how it feels ter ride in it. You’ve seen a lot o’ the world, hain’t you, Sammy?” coming back to earth with a wistful smile on his face.

But Sammy, lying wide awake that night beside the slumbering Zack, in the quaint little hotel which had seemed so big to Zack and Ama Jane, thought, with his old sense of responsibility keen upon him, that he had seen very little and knew much less of the big world of which his year at the University had given him such a delicious and tantalizing glimpse. And now he must put aside all his dreams of it, all his hopes of it, to fight for it, that part of it which was native land. He was doing it with all a boy’s fierce patriotism, and yet, perhaps, he must lay down his life for it. At the University this last spring, his chief concern had been that he would not have an opportunity thus to lay down his life if necessity demanded — that if he failed to get to the front

with the first companies, his chance for glory, for self-sacrifice, for a martyr's death, would be lost him forever; for with others older and wiser and far more experienced in the ways of war than was he, he never doubted that one or two battles would settle the great controversy between North and South. He had been in a constant fever of anxiety to be off, for the worn old doors of the University to clang behind him, it might be for a brief summer, it might be forever. Anything, rather than that all should be over before ever he had had his chance.

He was a member of the military company fathered by the University, and when war loomed inevitable and imminent on the college horizon, and a sudden quickening heart throb of realism was splashed into the dead placidity of humdrum, meaningless drill — just drill for drill's sake — his calm indifference had at once leapt into consuming ardor, and the once dull parade ground became strangely appealing, a place of absorbing interest, of a fever of effort at perfection. He had not been the only one so affected, by any means. The University was situated in a very hot-bed of *copperheadism*, adherents to which cult were sympathizers of the South, though when the time came, often lacking the superb physical courage or the moral grandeur to fight for it, and these kept the atmosphere of both

town and college rife with feeling. Also, in the University, there were numbers of the real worth of that which afterward made up the *personnel* of the southern army, and these entered into the drill with the same fierce fervor which marked Sammy Goodman and many another boy of northern birth or northern sympathies and unafraid. So intense did the feeling become before the spring term was over, and so bitterly were the merits of the great world question fought over, it was little wonder young blood was keyed to such a pitch that, when the first faint dawn of a morning in April disclosed the stars and bars of the first flag of the South as separate and distinct from the flag of the Republic floating over the University building, something snapped.

There was little accomplished that day in the way of bookish lore. The time was given over almost entirely to hot charges and counter-charges, insult answering insult, finally fought out in many and many a personal encounter, fist to fist. It was never really known who the bold defiers of the neutrality of the University were, whether *copperheads* or actual students, but the boys of the South contested with fierce determination the efforts of the boys of the North to scale the lofty roof and haul down the haughty, flaunting colors which flapped triumphantly in the snappy April breeze all the live-long day,

while the professors — Heaven rest their harrowed souls — did nothing. It was Sammy Goodman, who, just before sunset — Fort Sumter had just been fired upon and his blood was hot with resentment — lithe and sure-footed from his woods' training, scaled the sloping and dangerous roof and stood, pale and panting, beneath the rippling bars, as the rival reds in the western sky proclaimed the imminent setting of the sun.

He looked an atom only of a man to his friends below, and their cheers came to him but faintly. But he did not need them now. He had needed them when the dangerous, difficult feat loomed lonely before him — Sammy always liked his world's applause — but that was all behind him now, forgotten in accomplishment. He was panting with the physical effort it had taken, pale with the emotion of his high determination to haul down those flaunting colors before the sun should set on the stain to his country's honor. Sammy was young, and the drills and the discussions and the hot partizanship had stirred his patriotism strangely, so that he thought in such sounding phrases. How he had eluded the watchfulness of the southern sympathizers, who, crestfallen and chagrined, were grouped below in the press of almost the entire student body, including a sprinkling of

professorial dignity, might perhaps be laid to the litheness, the stealth, and the cunning which he had unconsciously imbibed from the wild woods creatures of his homespun boyhood. The word had gone forth among his friends to keep all eyes upon that despised flag at sunset. Hence, the crush of spectators, for the word had seeped into the enemy's camp as well. As has been said, Sammy always liked to have the eyes of his world upon him. It will be remembered that, when a boy and called upon from the pulpit, he wondered if Mary Ann Hamilton was not proud of his friendship. But he did not know that any one was looking when he cut the cord which had given the false flag to the breeze. He was as one inspired and he thought only of treason trampled upon, of honor triumphant.

Tonight, as he turned on his hard, corn-shuck tick in the primitive little hotel at the primitive little village of Lagoottee, all that University life seemed very, very far away, and he had his first prescience that perhaps the coming strife would not be so soon over as the world thought. His chance had waited for him despite his fevered fear and impatience, but somehow, tonight, it seemed to stretch before him into vague distances where no end was sighted.

CHAPTER VII

THE GHOST

“**A**ND now for the news,” said Sammy, leaning back in the roomy seat with a certain sense of rest and luxuriousness after the tension of the last few months at the University, where indulgence in prejudice and passion had been quite as mentally wearing as delving into the wisdom of the sages. He was content to let Zack hold the lines; for the slow, clumsy, broad-backed, absolutely trustworthy, old work horses which had grown up in the Goodman stable were proved zest-killers in the manly art of driving. The start homeward had been an early one, and the June morning was fair and still.

“The’ ain’t no news ’ceptin’ what you know already, as I knows on. ’D up, there! What does possess you to be so low-down ornery, ol’ Startle? Pap finally got that-air painter that’s been hangin’ round so long.”

“Do n’t forget to tell Sammy about old man Carmichael,” put in Mollie, from the back seat, leaning forward the better to see and admire the new, worldly, grown-up, easily tolerant look on Sammy’s face. She could n’t help liking that

slightly amused, somewhat bored, altogether friendly, if condescending, manner he had assumed toward Zack since he had come back from the University — was it only last night — even though, in a way, it put her and Ama Jane and the busy mother and all their homely doings in the same class with Zack.

“ I ain’t kakilatin’ ter forget,” said Zack, with dignity. Nor was he. In spite of his modest assertion that there was no news, to speak of, that which he had stored up to tell Sammy could not well be told in the twenty miles that lay before them. “ O’ course you know he got religion at the revival last winter? ”

“ So Mollie wrote me.”

“ Everybody did, for that matter. Brother Craik said it was the greatest outpourin’ o’ the Holy Spirit it had ever been his good fortune ter witness. Folks was powerful mournful for a right smart spell, realizin’ the awful state o’ sin they was in at. We did n’t have no good times no more — an’ we was so contented like before. Someway, I — but Sammy, how about your own self; have you got religion? ”

“ I hope so,” replied Sammy, smiling.

“ Any more than you had before you went away? ”

“ Why, I hope I get more every day that I live. Is n’t that the way it ought to be? ”

"Did you jine the church down there ter the University?"

"No."

"I 'low that's why you kin still laugh like you useter," said Zack with a relieved relaxation of his perturbed countenance. "I 'll stump you ter not. I 'd purt' nigh ruther be lost once an' for all an' be done with it than ter be wonderin' every blessed minute if you 're goin' ter be, an' weepin' an' wailin' over the likelihood of it, would n't you? I like ter be happy," he added, naively.

"It's like war, I reckon," said the other boy, dreamily. "I wonder — do you suppose — I wonder if we shall have the fear of death with us all the time, Zack? That would be a thousand deaths in one, would n't it? If I thought I should not get the best of that fear, I should want to be killed in our first battle."

"You kin jist bet I would, too," declared Zack, emphatically. "Well, as I was a-sayin', after a while, a many backslid, but not ol' Carmichael. Folks was always a-lookin' for him to, an' we was all mighty surprised when he kep' right on bein' straight — never drank a drop nor swore a swear as anybody hearn tell on — an' the women was n't a-feared ter have him come ter their houses no more, he was so nice-spoken an' said war was the greatest crime o' the ages an' forbid o' God, an' he kep' tellin' the boys never, never ter fight their

fellow-men — it was wicked an' God would never forgive it nor forget it. So o' course, he was very well liked o' all the women folks all of a sudden — with all this war talk in the air."

"And once when mam asked him if God had forgiven him the lives he put out in his old War of 1812," piped up Ama Jane, excitedly, "he just up and cried, and said he was afraid not, but he was going to keep praying for forgiveness till they carried him to Shiloh graveyard; and then mam snapped up sharp that that would n't bring those boys back to their mothers and homes, and it was a pity folks did n't think of that beforehand and not be pluming themselves so much on their religion afterward. Ain't mam been converted, Sammy?"

"There are some people, Baby, who do n't need conversion, I think, because their feet have never strayed. Your mother is one of them. And what did Carmichael say to that, Zack?"

"Why, he cried some more an' said anyway he'd haft ter jist keep on a-prayin', that was his only hope."

"Good for old Carmichael," said Sammy, good-naturedly, trying to make a mental picture of his good-hearted, profane, old friend on the anxious seat. Something must have been wrong with his execution, however, for the picture would n't make. Always, he saw the twinkle

behind the lugubrious countenance depicted by Zack's graphic recital; always, he heard complacent braggadocio and picturesque profanity through the sounds of penitent tears and fearful lamentation. Therefore, he was not surprised at Zack's next words.

"An' Mollie never wrote you 'bout his backslidin'? I 'low she thought you 'd be ashamed of it — you always did stand up so for the ol' whiskey barrel. Well, the church is shet o' him at last, an' I 'low they 're right glad. We was over ter the settlement, pap an' I, when the word was brought. He was haranguin' a crowd o' us fellers for talkin' of enlistin', an' pintin' out the errors of our ways, an' he cried some, too. He was an ol' man, an' you must n't hold that agin him. He stopped dead off when the word come, an' the queerest look come over his face — kind o' like that funny light jist before a thunder storm, you know. I was plumb skeert."

"What word, Zack? What in the world are you talking about?" cried Sammy, perplexed by the ambiguity of Zack's narrative as well as by his unusual loquacity.

"Why, the firin' on Fort Sumter, o' course," explained Zack, perplexed in his turn by Sammy's most unusual obtuseness. "Purty soon he begun. The first words was kind o' mumblin', like he did n't sense jist where he was

at an' was feelin' round. Then one fairly bust from him like a — like a cannon ball an' — ”

“ One what? ” demanded Sammy, impatiently.

“ One damn,” replied Zack, simply. “ An' then they followed so thick an' fast that I could n't keep up. He jist ripped 'em out o' his throat like as they was chokin' him. How he did swear, Sammy! I declare, it makes me creepy even yit, thinkin' 'bout'n it. I took time, howsomever, ter be thankful there was n't no women folks around. Purty soon, when he had sworned himself black in the face, he made a bee line for Dave's place an' he's been drunk ever since till — ”

“ Oh, he reformed again, did he, the old reprobate? ”

“ No, he did n't, Sammy.”

“ Oh, he did n't? What are Brother Craik and the other brothers and sisters doing about it then? ”

“ Nothin' now. They tried to, but he got ahead of 'em agin.”

“ How? ”

“ He died night afore last.”

Then it was that Sammy's picture of the rough old fighter made itself and truly, without help from him, before his inner vision — the life of many a pioneer fireside, the teller of many a good tale, an exponent of patriotism, a friend of chil-

dren, a kindly heart. There had been much that was sinful in his life, but it was the memory of those other things that lingered longest with Sammy and the other boys of the backwoods.

Sammy's mind was still dwelling upon the suddenness and sadness of his old friend's death, when Zack continued his narration of events, too full of all the things he had to impart to allow Sammy the luxury of mournful contemplation. There were all the things which had happened since the Christmas holidays, and much happens in the out of the way places of the earth, even as in the crowded centers. Old men die, and babies are born, there is much of toil for all, and sorrow, happily balanced with much of content and joy. Nor is war a respecter of persons or localities. Its clouds are generated in all the dark places of human error, they draw together, and the muttering of their assembling is heard in the secluded by-ways as well as in the busy thoroughfares of the land. In what way, then, was Dubois County so different from Sammy's great University, or the still greater places of the world?

"That air hant over ter Hank Halstead's has been gittin' powerful lively since you left. Seems like he appears most every night now."

"Mollie wrote me he had been cutting up high jinks lately. I suppose you superstitious ones still think he is — my father's spirit?"

"Superstitious nothin'! Course I do n't know whether it 's your pap or not, but it looks mighty like it ter me. There 's been mighty strange things goin' on over yander ter that ol' house an' on the creek bottom where your pap was murdered. You always did laugh at hants an' sich, an' I 'low you 're a-laughin' this very minute, but you need n't, 'cause I seed this one with my own eyes."

"Good! And what did it look like? Tell me quick! I am consumed with curiosity."

"It was a ghost light. It came an' went an' at last it floated right off through the air, taller 'n any man that was ever born. I wish they 'd ketch Hank. I do n't like hants. Mebbe if he was ketched, the spirit would rest quiet in its grave."

"There is nothing in it, Zack," said Sammy. "I do n't doubt that you saw a light and that there have been strange noises heard. You say so, therefore it is true. But, take my word for it, there is some other cause for those sights and sounds, some reason within the realms of possibility. I shall investigate when I get home."

"Better leave it alone, Sammy."

"One of the very first things I shall do will be to ferret out the meaning of all this mummary, and what is more, Zack, old boy, *you* will go with me when I do it."

"Do n't ever think it, Sammy Goodman! I 'll

never go with you, ner with nobody. I'll follow you in battle right up to the last an' git kilt if I haft ter. They 'd be jist men like us that would be killin' us. But I can't abide hants. I'm a-feared of 'em. You do n't know what they air or what they want. I'll never go over ter Hank's after candle-lightin' time as long as I live, an' you need n't count on it, nuther."

Sammy Goodman only smiled.

The attainment of two objects, both of absorbing interest, engrossed Sammy's attention now that at last he was home again and free from the exacting routine and the restraints of University life, so irritating when war was on the wing and one so longed to be up and preparing for the impact. The first one was his enlistment. He lost no time in looking up the best opportunity to enlist in the volunteer service. As Zack had said, Captain Aleck Moses was organizing a company at Jasper, but it would be some time before the organization would be completed and the company ready to march. Chafing at the idea of further delay, fearful of victory, a cessation of hostilities, and peace before ever he could get to the front, he decided to join a company in an adjoining county, which would soon be ready to leave for Indianapolis, the centralizing point. Its captain had been a schoolmate of Sammy's, had belonged to the same military organization, and

had taken note that Sammy, already known as the backwoods scholar, was well up in the manual of arms. Because of this and because they were friends besides, he had Sammy elected first lieutenant. As a matter of course, Zack enlisted in the same company as a private, and was much, much prouder of Sammy's commission than was that officer himself.

That matter satisfactorily disposed of gave Sammy time to probe into the question of the ghost at the Hank Halstead place. He soon learned that it was the principal topic of conversation in the neighborhood. The house had stood empty since the day of the murder. Hank's brother, father of the young Bob of bat-slugging fame, had worked the place every year, but the house itself had remained vacant. For some time, peculiar lights had been seen and uncanny sounds heard about the old place, around the house and in the adjoining woods. There were people who even claimed to have seen a white-robed figure waving a skeleton hand. All this was of special interest to Sammy because of the foolish ones and superstitious, who believed, and spread the belief, that the so-called "hant" was the ghost of Gerry Goodman, who could not rest quietly in his grave until his murderer had been brought to merited justice.

When Sammy had made known his conviction

that the man whom he and Zack had seen more than four years ago when they watched beside a tree'd coon was none other than Hank Halstead himself, diligent search had been made around the premises; but when no trace of the fugitive could be found, no sign of human presence or late occupancy of the house, when their efforts were only met with a profounder silence, a deeper mystery, then, more than ever, did the folk of the neighborhood harbor the belief that the place was haunted, and that the boys had really seen the ghost itself. In vain, Sammy, in the daytime, when his reason was in the ascendancy, raged against the imputation, and urged with feverish impatience more search and yet more. His experience in the woods that night served only to strengthen the hold of the ghost in the minds of his neighbors.

The longed-for time had now come when he was determined to lay to rest once and for all time the prevalent idea that his father's spirit was wandering unhappily upon the earth, haunting the place where he had so foully met his death, seeking the rest that would not come until his murderer suffer the penalty of his crime. In addition to his desire effectually to put a stop to the gossip, Sammy firmly believed that Hank Halstead was at the bottom of all this new ghost business, and his hands fairly ached to have the

man in his clutches. He would solve the mystery before time to join his company if he had to brave the unknown terrors of the haunted house alone, and he would stay by them every night until they revealed themselves; but he still counted on Zack, and, in the end, Zack was not proof against the compliment implied in the expectation, especially after Sammy had reiterated a solemn promise that he would take the initiative in everything, and always go ahead.

“As it would seem that our friend, the ghost, has chosen the mysterious hour of midnight for shoving his shopworn demonstrations upon a too credulous world,” said Sammy, “we, also, will haunt that hour, Zachariah Posey; one night, I, and the next, you. Oh, I don’t mean for a minute that you are to go there alone — don’t look so obstinately appalled. What I do mean is this: Mother says that even she has seen and heard very strange things over there. Now, as we are the closest to Hank’s place, I propose that right here we set our watch. Tonight, I will sit by the attic window till well past midnight — tomorrow, you, and so on until there are developments, or until we are ordered to Indianapolis. At the very first sign of activity on the part of his ghostship, we will both start out on a tour of investigation.”

So it was agreed. Several nights thus passed

away without any developments of a startling nature. Even Zack began to lose faith in ghosts, while the growing belief pressed home to Sammy, in his youthful egotism, that the masquerader was afraid because of the presence of his victim's son, and had decided to postpone further demonstrations until Sammy's marching orders came to make safe once more the parade of the "hant's" unholy practices.

And now marching orders had come, and the last night at home, and it was Zack's watch. Sammy went to bed more disappointed than he could have imagined possible on the eve of at last actually going to the war. He fell asleep, however, consoling himself with the reflection that Mollie would write if the ghost renewed activities after his departure, and, if he did, woe to him, for Sammy would obtain an early leave of absence and would slip home without the knowledge of anyone, and surprise the ghost at his tricks at the very moment when he deemed himself most immune from danger.

All the household slept at last, worn out with thoughts of the desolation of the morrow, when two homespun boys would go marching away, blithely, never to come back again; for if they were spared the martyr's death, saddened men would come sorrowfully home, leaving their buoyant youth on the bloody fields where so many

of their comrades must lay down their all. Zack alone was awake in all the quiet, solemn place, sitting in the unlighted attic, close to the tiny window, looking out upon the clear, star-lit, midnight sky, and the dark, still, mysterious woods, listening to Sammy's regular breathing, awe-struck with the deep silence of the serene night and the vague but poignant consciousness of the gravity of the morrow's venture. Time dragged slowly away, and Zack's eyes began to grow heavy with sleep. And then he saw it — the ghost light. He sat up straight and rubbed his eyes to make sure. He had been growing skeptical of late, and he thought he might have dozed off and seen the glancing light in a dream. No, there it was, floating about in the timber across Crooked Creek. All his old blind fear and the shivering impulse to run and hide came over the simple lad with redoubled force.

"Sammy, Sammy," he whispered, hoarsely, groping his way over to the bed, "it's there, the hant! I seed it. Wake up, for God's sake!"

"Oh, so his ghostship is abroad at last, is he?" cried Sammy, springing out of bed and running to the window. "For heaven's sake, Zack, what are you doing?"

"It's the hant, I tell you!" cried Zack, in a muffled, terror-stricken voice, burrowing farther into the depths of the feather tick.

"So I see," said Sammy, in a stern, determined voice, inwardly bracing himself for the coming encounter with the supposedly supernatural. His face was pale as he began hastily to draw on his clothes, but it was more on account of the solemn thought that he was about to come face to face with his father's murderer than from any fear of the occult, and, luckily, Zack could not see it in the dark of the attic chamber. "Get out of bed this minute, Zachariah Posey! We have n't a moment to lose!"

"But — Sammy," came in wavering tones from the fluffy mass of feathers, "I tell you it's the hant! Do n't you think human beings had orter let hant things alone? I'm powerful 'fraid something 'll happen so 's we can't go ter the war termorrer."

But Sammy was adamant against even this appeal.

"Then it 'll have to happen," he said, decidedly, "for we are going to run down the ghost business this very night — war or no war. I reckon there 'll be plenty other fellows glad to take our places. You promised, Zack."

"An' I was right smart of a idjit for doin' it, too," said Zack, plaintively, crawling slowly out of bed. "Seein 's you 're so all-fired smart at rememberin' promises, do n't you go ter forgittin' yours."

"To go ahead? I sha' n't forget. Come on, Zack!"

"You see," said Sammy, in a low tone, as they struck into the creek path, "I believe from the bottom of my soul that the ghost is Hank himself, and that he is using this method to intimidate people so that they will avoid his place, especially at night, and allow him to walk about without being seen."

"I can't see for the life o' me what he 'd want ter hang around for when he can't live there openly an' in daylight," said Zack, unbelievably.

"It's his home, you know, and nobody ever goes there any more, just on account of these ghost-shines. Who knows but that he may spend the greater part of his time right there at home?"

"Well, you kin believe what you're a mind to," responded Zack, "but I believe it's a shore 'nough hant an' it 'pears ter me it's right smart presumptuous on our part ter dast ter interfere with his wanderings. He knows his own business, I 'low."

All this time, the light danced ahead of them, moving deeper and deeper into the dark blur of the forest, and always toward Hank Halstead's place. When the boys came into the clearing around the house, the light had disappeared. It

was well past midnight and an eerie silence rested upon the deserted premises. There was an empty, desolate look about the cabin with its sagging door and rotting stoop, and the path was weed-choked. Zack shivered with premonitory dread, and even Sammy hesitated for a hardly perceptible moment, then he whispered, resolutely:

"I am going in, Zack. You must be ready for a scrap if it should prove to be Hank, for he will fight like the devil before he will be taken."

"Law me, do n't tell me you air really goin' inter that house knowin' there 's a hant in there!" cried Zack, his teeth chattering uncontrollably.

"I certainly am," replied Sammy, pushing open the door as he spoke, and, at the same time, striking a match and lighting his lantern.

They stepped inside, Sammy well in the lead, and were greeted by an empty room and a damp, musty smell that clings to disused houses, and they felt the clamminess of the heavy air, betokening a long absence of the sunshine. The dull glimmer of their lantern was too feeble to penetrate to the farthest corners, and these remained in shadow. The boys stood motionless for some time. The only sound to be heard was Zack's teeth which would occasionally chatter.

Sammy had just concluded to advance and investigate further, when a faint sound as of some

one stepping softly over the floor came from the adjoining room. The boys gazed intently at the closed door separating the two rooms, Sammy in grim determination, Zack in a paralysis of fright. Presently, there was a slight, creaking noise, and a streak of light appeared as if the door had been set ajar and there was a light in the room beyond. Suddenly, it went out, the door opened wide, and there glided into the shadowy apartment a most uncanny, ghostly figure, draped all in white, and from whose eyes and nose and mouth glowed steady points of unearthly fire. It stood motionless for a few moments and then slowly stretched forth a hand on which there was no flesh whatsoever — a skeleton hand — and pointed it solemnly at the terrified young men. Zack gave one gasp for breath and bolted for the door. Sammy had need now of all his skepticism. In spite of himself, a great dread of the supernatural crept over him. The weird hour, the eerie silence, the unfriendly dark, the awful shine of the bluish light now shooting forth from eyes, mouth, and nostrils, combined to render him so weak with fear that he stood rooted to the spot, without motion and without speech. With a supreme effort, however, he rallied his reason to the rescue, drew from its holster the large revolver which he had recently purchased to take to the

army with him, and, pointing it squarely at the seeming visitor from another world, cried out with a right gallant courage:

“Throw off those ghost trappings and tell me who you are, or I’ll shoot you where you stand!”

The apparition seemed to waver a moment as if undecided whether to float off into space or to fade away into nothingness on the spot. Its garments exuded a damp, unpleasant odor as of mildew, suggestive of graveyards, and clung closely to the attenuated figure. And then, suddenly, there was only space where the ghost had stood. Only the same damp, empty room with its shadowy corners and the dim light from the lantern flickering upon the walls greeted Sammy’s astonished eyes. Was he dreaming? Had he been walking in his sleep, and had dreamed that meeting with the ghost, and had but just now awakened?

The outer door of the old building had been left open, the night breeze had risen, and now, floating in, caused the dull flame of the lantern to dance fantastically. For a moment, Sammy was seized with an almost uncontrollable impulse to follow Zack, but memory came to him swiftly of a flutter of garments followed by the sound of a softly closing door. Quick as the retreat had been, this was evidence enough that the ghost had not vanished into the air or through



A most uncanny, ghostly figure, draped all in white

the thick walls as is the way of spirits. He sprang to the door, only to find that it had been bolted on the other side. With a few vigorous kicks, he broke in the door. Snatching up the lantern, he pushed his way through. This second room was empty also. It had no other outlet except the shattered door through which he had just come.

There was no outside door to be seen, no sign of a trap door on floor or ceiling. There was one small window, to be sure, but it was nailed down from the inside. The room was unfurnished as the first one had been and cobwebs clustered thickly about and hung in long, dusty threads from the rough ceiling. Sammy swung his lantern into every dim corner and over all the bare, roughly plastered, log walls with their marred and discolored but rather pretentious wainscoting in search of a possible exit, made the same careful survey outside the cabin hoping to discover hint here of a secret opening which had been more cleverly concealed within. All to no avail. And then his hair began slowly to rise and an icy chill struck to his heart. In sheer, baffled bewilderment, he hastened from the haunted house with its mystery still unsolved, leaving it in the keeping of the night and the silence, with the wind sighing in the treetops, and the wan stars of that ghostly hour before the

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dawn seeming to mock human presumption and human impotency in the face of the unknown.

At the creek, Zack peered cautiously forth from the protection of a giant oak.

"That you, Sammy?" he whispered.

"No doubt about it, Zack. It is I, and in the flesh, too, strange as that may seem."

Once more in the attic bedroom, Zack found voice to say in a tone of terrified triumph:

"What do you think about hants now?"

"Just what I have always thought," replied Sammy, rather shortly. "The ghost was a man, of course. What knocks me all out is the fact that it was n't Hank after all. He was too short and too thin. Who was it, Zachariah Posey?"

CHAPTER VIII

THE BROKEN-DISH QUILT

“**B**UT, Zack,” exclaimed Sammy, in a dismayed undertone, because mother and sisters of both were hovering very near, and it would never do to hurt feelings already strained almost to the breaking point, where smiles were sadder than tears, and the little pauses in the voice more heart-broken than a storm of sobs, “I am sure you won’t need those boots. You have already stowed away one extra pair, and they ’ll get most mighty dadsizzling heavy and bunglesome on the march through rain and mud. You know we can’t expect fair weather all the time. The Government will furnish you with army boots as you need them. Better leave these behind — that ’s my advice. As I ’ve told you a hundred times, the less we have to encumber ourselves with, the better off we shall be.”

“Can’t,” said Zack, doggedly, mopping his round, heated face with a much soiled red handkerchief, and sitting down despondently upon the heterogenous heap of clothing, bedding, cooking utensils and other household goods, piled up in such extravagant profusion as the poor,

unsophisticated lad had never known in all his life before. The shiftless Poseys had done what they could to swell the heap, and Mrs. Goodman and other neighbors had done the rest. "Pap sold his new gun ter git 'em — these here an' some other things that I do n't need no more 'n a rabbit. Land only knows what they'll do for game now, 'specially 'gin winter comes, if we ain't back yit. Pap's ol' gun would n't hit a cow six feet away. I declare ter goodness I wisht he had n't a-done it. But I jist haft ter take 'em, Sammy. The folks was right smart hurted 'bout'n the feather tick an' the rocking cheer an' the cook stove. Mam said the stove was so little it could be right easy toted 'round, an' she cried 'bout'n the tick. She 'lowed I'd take a passel o' cold every night sleepin' out right on the ground thataway. An' I purt' nigh had ter give in 'bout'n the cheer. I could n't a held out agin her only I knew how you'd laugh. Mam said it would rest me so ter rock after fightin' all day."

"I thought I had mother where she understood that we simply can't take everything," said Sammy, shaking his head dubiously over the motley array on the ground, "but I see she has smuggled in some of my favorite books in spite of me — all wrapped up in new shirts. However, she is n't a patchin' to the neighbors. Mrs.

Hobbs has been in and out all morning with pies and cookies and salt-risin' bread and chair tidies. She says she knows the Government won't give us anything fit to eat. I declare if there is n't Aunt Salina Haskins! The old lady's a brick. She has never held it against me — the trouncing I gave her blessed grandson, Bob Halstead. I wonder what in creation she's brought? We'll simply have to tell her, Zack, that we can't stow away another thing."

A little, wiry, old lady with pretty, wavy gray hair and quick, nervous movements, came bustling around the corner of the house, knitting away energetically, so accustomed to the task that she seldom turned her bright eyes with their steel-bowed spectacles toward it. She was aunt by courtesy to all the neighborhood, mother and grandmother to a numerous progeny, and homeless except for a corner by the fireplace in the humble homes of any and all of her sons and daughters. She went "a-visitin'" by the day, and was as welcome as the flowers in May. To be sure, she talked incessantly, but that was more often an advantage to her hostesses than otherwise. Such an inveterate visitor as she was of necessity gathered much gossip, the inevitable dispensing of which was as good as a modern rural free delivery, and served the double purpose of keeping the busy housewives conversant

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with the news, of the day without their taking the time or the trouble for the perusal of the written word. They worked while Aunt Salina talked. On visiting days, she rode when a horse could be spared, and walked when it could not. This was a walking day as was clearly evinced by the damp curliness of the hair around her forehead, the flush of exertion on her lined, humorous face, and the mantle of fine yellow dust on her shoes and in the folds of her dark linsey woolsey gown and neat white apron.

“Mis’ Goodman said you boys was out here in the back finishin’ up your packin’,” she said, knitting assiduously. “Tarnation hot, ain’t it?” She tossed a brown sunbonnet under a shady locust tree. “Right glad to be shet o’ that hot ol’ thing I be, I kin tell you. Had to walk over — critters was all in the fiel’ — all right, too, I ’low, seein’ s it give me a chanct to keep to work on these here socks. I ’m almost through now. I ’ve turned the last heel. I never could knit and drive at the same time. Them pesky critters o’ Jake’s and Serepty’s air so powerful contrary they shy at a grasshopper, and I simply got to finish these here socks, Sammy. They ’re your’n. I got Zack’s all done. They ’re here in my pocket. Susie stuck a posey in ’em. It does beat all how silly girls gits over sogers and uniforms. Here ’s Susie not turned

seventeen yit draggin' round the house pale and no 'count and sniffin' in corners jist cause Zack here 's goin' to the war, when land knows she would n't look at him before, and that 's no dispar'gemunt to you, either, Zack. Susie 's jist plumb foolish, if I do say so who should n't, seein 's how she 's my own granddaughter, and I dunno as I blame her much. Sogers air sogers and they ain't to be picked up every day, and they do git kilt sometimes, that 's a fact.

"Jake and Bob ain't kakilatin' none on goin', the Halsteads never were strong on niggers, so Susie feels that romantic over having ketched a soger sweetheart that she 's fair livin' in the clouds these days. I 'low you boys 'll wear out a right smart o' socks, and as I ain't a -lookin' for the Government to enter into no contract to keep 'em darned, I 'lowed you could n't have too many. I wanted to give you something, it 'll be such a comfort to a body to remember if you never come back. I 've been knittin' stiddy ever sence I hearn tell you had jined that-air company that was goin' so soon. Mis' Goodman said you was 'bout ready to start. Why, I want to know, if there ain't Mollie right this minute a-hitchin' up — good land o' live, and me not done yit! I 'll set right down here in the shade and finish — 't won't take long — and I hain't ary a thing to take me home. You won't mind waitin' will you,

Sammy? I 'low the Government 'll keep you long enough from your ma once they git their hands on you, without your hurryin' away from her now.

"Oh, yes, I purt' nigh forgot to tell you, I pieced you a quilt. I packed it over myself to give to your ma to put with your other things. It 's the Broken-dish pattern, kind o' 'propriate to the occasion, you know, broken hearts and homes and everything. It 's for both o' you. I did n't have time to piece two, and o' course you 'll sleep together all the time — goin' from the same place like you air and always was thicker 'n peas in a pod anyway — so one 's a plenty for you both, and do n't quarrel over it whatever you do. I made it impartial — as much Zack's as Sammy 's, as much Sammy's as Zack's."

"Why, Aunt Salina, it was awfully good of you to remember us so handsomely and to carry the things over yourself through the hot sun." began Sammy, thinking ruefully of all the quilts and comfortables and blankets and countless other things which would in all probability get no farther than Indianapolis, if, indeed, they got so far as that. But he was touched by the attention, and found it impossible to hurt the kindly old lady's feelings by a refusal of the gifts so laboriously contrived from her meager resources.

"But we air plumb full to runnin' over now,

Aunt Salina," put in Zack, mindful of Sammy's admonition, and resolved to throw himself into the breach in order to square himself on sundry other counts in which he had weakly allowed himself to be won over by his tearful and insistent womenfolks against Sammy's freely given advice and his own better judgment.

"So we are," cut in Sammy, hastily, turning away from Zack's astonished stare, "but we certainly will find room for Aunt Salina's presents — especially considering how useful they will be. We'll leave out something else if we have to — we have n't room for gimcracks, that's a fact — but quilts and socks — why, we'll need 'em every day, Aunt Salina, and we'll bless you every time we crawl under that Broken Dish or pull the socks over our tired feet."

"I hope you will," said Aunt Salina, complacently, beginning to narrow for the toe. "That's the kind o' presents I like to give — useful ones. I know you boys won't git no more home comforts in a hurry, and I'll like to think o' you, mebbe cold and wet and wored out with the battle, creepin' into your tent some rainy night and bein' warmed and comforted by these pore little things your ol' Aunt Salina made for you. They're not much, I know, but if they warm you jist once when you're cold, I'm more than paid."

For the first time that day — the great day — the day when he was going to the war — tears smarted in Sammy's eyes, why, he could not have told. But in the after time, through the smoke of battle, by the faint glow of a dying camp fire, on weary marches, in countless homesick longings, this picture came to him many times: the little dusty old woman talking and rocking and knitting under the shade of the old locust tree; his mother going in and out of the cabin door, continually thinking of some last thing to be packed for the comfort or convenience of the soldier boys; Zack's father and mother wandering aimlessly about helplessly allowing the direction of affairs to the stronger head; the tow-headed, dirty-faced, half-clad little brothers and sisters of Zack racing noisily and unchecked all around the premises; Ama Jane sitting on the back stoop in everybody's way, busily conning her lesson in which she had received careful instruction from brother Sammy earlier in the morning — Samuel Edward Goodman, First Lieutenant, Company E, Eighteenth Indiana Regiment — Samuel Edward Goodman, First Lieutenant, Company E, Eighteenth Indiana Regiment; Mollie, the care-taker, in the ample carry-all driving up the big work horses; Mrs. Hobbs, their nearest neighbor, skurrying down the dusty road on some last suddenly remem-

bered errand — more chair tidies, maybe; the distant, restful green of the majestic beeches and sycamores and oaks which marked the garden spot of Shiloh Cemetery — the God's Acre where his father lay sleeping — and the nearer, darker, more sinister shade of the place where a ghost walked by night; and over all — with Zack and himself the center of it all — the soft, warm, drowsy sunshine, the blue, white-capped summer sky, with droning bees and gay butterflies flitting from luxuriant trumpet-vine to fragrant honeysuckle, and from thence to a sweet wild timber rosebush, and so the rounds again. And this was home — and peace.

CHAPTER IX

THE ARMY OF THE SOUTHWEST

IT WAS the fore part of February, 1862, and the Army of the Southwest had reached the Osage River on its third expedition against Price, who was still maintaining the fiction that he was commanding state troops only, to “repel invasion,” although it was very well known in Missouri that, not only was he a Secessionist at heart, as was the man who put him in power, Governor “Claib” Jackson, but that his whole ambition was bent upon bringing into the Confederate service a full division of Missouri troops, the price of the Major-Generalship in the Confederate army, promised him by Jefferson Davis, though not with the best grace in the world, and for which his soul hungered. Twice before had the eager soldiers marched the many weary miles from the Union bases at Sedalia and Rolla to Springfield. The marching back and forth had been over a rough country and in inclement weather. Each time the forward movement was made, the men felt that they were about to strike a decisive blow for their country, and, for that reason, there was little or no complaint at the

awful hardships they were compelled constantly to endure.

Twice, without understanding the why or the wherefore, ordered back to the railroad at the very moment when their young volunteer hearts were beating high with hope of battle, they yet entered into this third movement against the elusive Price with almost the same ardent enthusiasm and glowing confidence in their power to put down the rebellion, for which purpose they had enlisted, as soon as ever the opportunity to fight was given them, as had characterized their attitude toward the first expedition. Most of these young men were northern born and chafed under the mere thought of being unduly delayed or defeated in their fierce desire for immediate action by the condition of the winter roads, which were, in truth, the worst Missouri, a state of bad roads at best, had seen for many years.

Winter time had always been work time in their northern homes and they were impatient of the enforced idleness and of the "shiftless" southern way of waiting for fairer weather and better highways. What was mud, even worlds of it, menacing wagon trains, and coldly and stickily vengeful toward infantry and cavalry as well as artillery for this insolent invasion of its habitual winter solitude; or what were storms of rain and sleet and snow that they should so mis-

takenly think to halt the progress of the great Army of the Southwest, hastening to crush the enemies of the Government and to close the war so that it might be at home in time for the spring plowing? Turbulent, icy, bank-full streams were forded with unremitting zeal, wagons pried out of quagmires or hauled up steep hills with complacent good-humor — because *the hour was come!*

General Curtis, recently assigned by General Halleck, the new Commander of the Department of the West, to the command of the Army of the Southwest, was even then at Lebanon, his first base, waiting for his main army to come up — and *it was coming!* For, “Dadsizzle the roads!” said Sammy Goodman, under his breath, and regardless of the irremediable stains to his uniform because of the gladness within him, “Hold back the old Eighteenth? I guess not!” And, “Darn the mud!” cried Zachariah Posey, aloud, hauling a boot out of the depths of it, vigorously, so not to lose his place in the march, “If ye think ter stop the ol’ Eighteenth Injiana with sich low-down, ornery tricks as that air, I ’low you ’re barkin’ up the wrong tree.” And of like fibre was the sentiment of all those gallant volunteers hastening to join Curtis for his campaign against Sterling Price.

The morning after going into camp, Sammy

found Zack in his tent laboriously engaged in writing a letter. The sheet of paper was spread before him on a hard-tack box, and he was sprawling over the whole, his face, from which perspiration dripped profusely, though the February wind was keen, very close indeed to the wavering script. Zack's education had not progressed far since that long ago day when he had dared to choose little Mary Ann Hamilton to support him in the spelling match rather than that youthful, intellectual giant, Sammy Goodman. There was no doubt that writing a letter, although it might be a labor of love, was, nevertheless, for Zachariah Posey, a labor. At the top of the sheet was pictured a huge red cannon belching forth volumes of crimson smoke.

"It fairly booms," said Sammy, stepping up to the box at which Zack was sitting. "Whom on earth are you writing to on that noisy paper, Zack? You must be trying to make your correspondent think we are in the thick of bloody warfare so that he — or she — will thrill for you. Such make-believe is rank deception, Zackie, my boy, in other words, it's plain lying and I ought not to countenance it. Ugh! Cannon! We haven't so much as heard the faintest echo of anything resembling the noise of firearms, even so much as a pop gun or a Fourth of July torpedo, since the skirmish at Black Water. If this

is war, give me peace every time. I might at least get some excitement out of fighting the ghost."

"Writin' ter Susie Halstead, who d'you suppose? You ain't got no call ter call this here paper loud. It's the purtiest I've seed sense I joined the army. Soon's I seed it at the sutler's, I got some, you bet."

"Well, I hope Susie will like it."

"An' why should n't she like it?" cried Zack, in some exasperation at Sammy's plainly implied criticism of his taste. "All of six girls was mighty perticular ter ast me ter write ter 'em when I got ter the front, an' I ain't writ ter ary one 'ceptin' jist Susie. I 'low that 'll please her some? It ought ter, anyway," he concluded, blushing bashfully, but valiant in his defence.

"Talk about conceit! But I am wondering how Susie is to know how you were besought of all those fair ones and how you were strong enough to resist their blandishments," said Sammy, laughingly, remembering yet other fair ones who had besought another soldier boy, but whom he refrained from mentioning.

"Oh, girls always talk those things over among themselves," replied Zack, with his newly acquired air of a man of the world. "She knew they ast me ter write ter 'em 'cause they told her, an' she knows I ain't a-writin' 'cause I told her

— so there you be. You 'd orter have a girl ter write ter stiddy, Sammy. I 'low I do n't know what I 'd do if I did n't have Susie ter write ter an' ter git letters from when the homesick spells come on. Mebbe, though, you've got somebody yander ter the University that you hain't told me 'bout'n yit?"

"Nary a one. Those Bloomington girls would n't look twice at a backwoodsman, even if I had seen one I hankered after. To tell the truth, I did see several whom I should not have minded writing to in the least if I 'd been asked, but —"

"Too bad you did n't have your uniform on down there," interrupted Zack, sympathetically, looking over Sammy's erect, blue-clad, clean-cut figure admiringly. "That shore would a fixed 'em."

"It *is* too bad, but I have one advantage over you, Zack. I am free to fall in love with some of these pretty southern girls."

"You're welcome ter 'em. I ain't seed ary one yit that could hold a taller candle ter Susie."

"Good for you, Zack," said Sammy, slapping his friend heartily on the shoulder in commendation of his loyalty. "But that is n't what I came to talk about. Seeing you always sets a fellow to thinking about home — and makes him wish we might both sleep under Aunt Salina's Broken

Dish quilt, and that sets him to remembering how long it has been since we marched away and yet here we are childishly playing 'Kitty wants a corner' with Price. I have been detailed to pick out fifty men from the company to go on a foraging expedition. Would you like to be one of them?"

"You kin jist bet I would! I'm dead tired o' doin' nothin', an' more 'n dead tired o' beans an' hard-tack. I 'low I'd feel right peart if I should jist happen like, on the side, ter see a chicken runnin' round 'thout no visible owner. Wisht I had some o' mam's dumplings right this minute."

"Ah, but it is strictly against orders to steal anything. We are simply to take the wagons, get some corn, pay for it in the coin of the realm, and return like good little boys."

"Who said anything about stealin'? You shorely do n't think I'd steal, do you, Sammy?"

"To be real candid with you, I think you would, under some circumstances; but you will have to refrain this time because it is against orders and I shall be there to see that they are enforced."

With Sammy's orders, had come the information that about five miles north of camp there was an extensive cornfield from which the grain had not yet been gathered, probably for the rea-

son that the landowner had been unable, on account of the troublous times, to employ the necessary help to harvest it.

It was about ten o'clock of that raw morning in February when, with his detail, he arrived at the appointed place. A general view of the premises gave him the impression that the owner or owners thereof had at one time at least been highly prosperous, and promised well for the probable extent and richness of the coveted cornfield; but a vague, indefinable air of neglect resting upon the spacious farmhouse and upon the big barns made him fear desertion, and boded ill for his praiseworthy determination to pay well for what he must carry away if anyone could be found within a radius of possibility upon whom the money might be legitimately forced. He stationed pickets at different points and then ordered the wagons into the cornfield.

When the work of loading the wagons was well begun, he started for the house. There were no signs of life anywhere about. The barns were empty, and the heavy doors padlocked. The house blinds were drawn close. As he approached, because war and its results were new to him, and he was young and untried so that he found all things touching upon the wide-reaching influence of war interesting, he could not help speculating as to the fortunes, past, present and

future, of the former day, but now departed, dwellers within the substantial Missouri farmhouse. Were they Southern sympathizers? Were the men of the family with Sterling Price or were they with Curtis or were they perhaps with Quantrill? If they were in the army at all, that fact would account for the air of neglect, and it was possible that some of the women-folks might be still at home. Or had they all fled the place, panic-stricken at the recent occupation of the Osage country by the armies of Price, or by the later approach of the Union forces?

Perhaps they had been plundered and forced to flee from Guerrillas, the meeting with a band of whom only the day before had been one of the few variations of the monotonous and seemingly endless march, march, march, and counter-march, through rain and snow and sleet, over sunken corduroy road and through mud that mired the guns countless times, of that long dreary winter. That Guerrillas were even now infesting the neighborhood had been reported to the young lieutenant, and he had reason to believe, besides, that a considerable body of Confederate troops was not far distant. The knowledge lent a thrill of pleasurable excitement to the little expedition. It was not altogether without hazard.

Despite the apparent desertion, Sammy

walked boldly to the front door and knocked loudly. There was no response from within, but a black cat, gaunt with hunger, scurried from under the porch and darted away, wild-eyed, afraid. Evidently, the family had been some time gone, or the cat would not have been in such a starved condition or so terror-stricken at human approach. On the mere chance of arousing somebody, however, and desirous of doing his full duty so that he might go away with his heaping wagons, consoled by the consciousness that he had done his best to square up for value received, he knocked again. Still no response. He knocked again and again, and then with a half smile at his persistence, he went around to the back door. Stepping upon the worn stone stoop, he was about to raise his hand when he paused a moment in surprise. Surely someone or something was moving within. He regretted now his too noisy and insistent rapping at the front door. It was very probable that there were only women-folk about and they had very naturally been alarmed at his boldness, cognizant as they must be of the near presence of marauding Guerrillas. That he had been heard, he could not doubt. He knocked gently this time. The subdued, rustling sound ceased immediately. He knocked again, more loudly. Within, all was quiet as the grave; without, there were only the moaning of the chill

wind in the leafless trees and the distant creaking of the wagons in the cornfield. He called aloud:

“I am from General Curtis’s army — Lieutenant Goodman of General Jeff C. Davis’s Division — I want to pay for the corn we are taking away!”

He thought thus to reassure any within should there be women or children, but he received no answer for his pains. Clearly there was something about this house that would bear careful investigation. He could not have been mistaken about that movement inside. It had sounded like some one stepping hastily and lightly across the floor. What should he do? He was in the enemy’s country. He did not believe that he could conscientiously turn away leaving the mystery unsolved. The house might be a hot bed of rebel intrigue, and his arrival untimely on account of the presence of some spy whose identity must not be known, and the people of the house were taking the precaution to conceal all evidence before his expected entrance. It was strange that, if this were a loyal household, Price, whose armies had ruthlessly raided every known Union or neutral farm during his occupation of the land, should have left it inviolate. However that might be, it was his absolute duty to pay for the corn if it could possibly be done.

He turned the knob but the door was locked as he had thought it would be. He looked at the panels speculatively. They were not very heavy though made of oak. He thought he might be able to push them in without much trouble, or the latch might give way. It did not appear very strong. Despite his slender suppleness, Sammy had all the strength of his clean blood and his woods' training.

"Well, here goes," he said, aloud. "If my methods are highwayman-like, I consider them justifiable, under the circumstances."

He put his shoulders to the task, thinking as he did so of another house he had broken into not so long ago, and smiling a little at the strangeness of his lot — that he should be thus once again and ruthlessly breaking in the doors of a private dwelling — he, with whom respect for property rights was almost an obsession. After a few vigorous pushes, the door gave way, and he stepped immediately into an orderly, well-equipped kitchen. There was nobody there, but neither was there dust nor cobwebs nor the chill of desertion. A wood fire smoldered upon the hearth but there seemed to be no preparations on hand for dinner. The table was spotlessly clean and bare of anything suggestive of approaching meal time — and Sammy was hungry. His early breakfast of coffee, hardtack, and thin

strips of broiled bacon had been wholly insufficient for the boy brought up on fried chicken and soda biscuits, smoking hot from the oven.

He did not linger in the empty room, however, but passed quickly through all the rooms on the ground floor. They were big, square apartments as was the southern custom of that day, and a very wise one, too, and immaculately neat, indicative of recent occupation. The furniture was good, although worn with age and usage. After satisfying himself that there was no human presence in any one of these rooms, he climbed the uncarpeted stairs, his soldier's tread sounding hollowly through the house. As he reached the landing, he thought he heard light footsteps going on before, but the corridor was empty. Entering one of the front bed-chambers, he heard, or fancied he heard, the faint click of a key turned in a lock.

At the sound, he hastened to a door on the opposite side of the room, only to find it locked. The chase was becoming exciting. He kicked the door open and found himself in another bedroom. There was no one there. He sprang to a door standing ajar and discovered that it opened upon a narrow stairway and, with one foot already upon the top step, heard a door close softly at the bottom. Fairly leaping down the steps Sammy threw open the door and

reentered the deserted kitchen. Altogether, it was a ghostly adventure. In spite of himself, a creepy sensation took possession of him, and he began to wonder if the whole world were haunted. He hesitated a moment, more than half inclined to call in Zack, or, remembering Zack's innate aversion to "hants," some other one of his men, and make a thorough and systematic search of the entire premises, when he heard, more distinctly than before, the sound of light footsteps, this time on the front stairway. The situation did not admit of the delay of calling for assistance.

Rushing to the hall and springing up the stairs he now could clearly hear some one running on ahead, leading over the same course he had pursued before. Again reaching the bottom of the stairs leading into the kitchen, he found the door open and was just in time to see a trap door in the floor, hitherto unnoticed, drop back into place. He pulled it open by means of its iron ring, disclosing rickety, worm-eaten, wooden stairs leading into a cellar. His curiosity was by this time thoroughly aroused and his blood was up so that he plunged into the yawning darkness without an instant's hesitation. With his foot on the solid dirt floor at last, he paused a moment, trying to pierce the dead gloom and to get his bearings. It was dark and damp and

musty and cold. He could hear no sound save the beating of his own heart.

"I have you cornered at last!" he cried. "Come out and save me the trouble of looking you up in this Stygian blackness! If I knock my nose against a bin of potatoes or a barrel of apples a few times, I am not likely to be charitably disposed."

Absolute silence answered him, but as his eyes became accustomed to the dark, and objects began to assume shape, he could see the dirt walls before him and was surprised to find that the cellar was of such meager dimensions. It simplified his task. Listening intently, he thought he could hear some one breathing. He decided that the sound came from behind some large packing boxes in the far corner. Drawing his revolver for the first time during the whole of this uncanny adventure, he stepped quietly forward, saying, curtly:

"Now, come out of there or I will haul you out by the heels!"

The same ghostly silence greeted his peremptory command, but there was no mistaking now the sound of quick breathing. He thrust a hand behind the box barricade, touched and immediately grasped a slender arm, seized it with both hands, and drew from behind the ineffectual shelter the now unresisting form of a woman.

By the faint glimmer of light from the open trap and from a tiny, dust-washed window, he observed that she was young and unafraid. She rose to her feet — she had been crouching low — shook herself free of his detaining hold, put her back against the cellar wall, and said:

“ Well? ”

CHAPTER X

AN EARNEST CHAMPION

“**W**ELL,” said Sammy, “I pulled you out as I said I would.”

“But not by the heels as you said you would.”

“Why did you run away from me?”

“Why did you run after me?”

“I thought you must be some rebel general, you tried so desperately to escape.”

“And I thought you must be some blood-thirsty Guerrilla, kicking down the door and rushing in the way you did.”

“Did n’t you hear me introduce myself?”

“In war time, the truth is not in — men.”

“If you had let me in when I asked you to, I should not have kicked down the door.”

“I did not want you to come in.”

“But I wanted to come in.”

“What for?”

“To see you, of course. Why did n’t you open the door?”

“I did n’t want to see you.”

“Well, you do n’t see me — and I can’t see you down here in this nether dark — so, now that

I am in, do n't you think we had better go up stairs and continue this argument in the light? Possibly you won't be so averse to seeing me after I have explained my errand, and I should be glad indeed to see you — in a better light."

"Now that you see I am only a poor, unprotected girl, do n't you think the very best thing you can do is to go away at once and leave me in peace?"

"I am loading some wagons out here in the cornfield and am trying to find some one with whom to settle the account."

"I do not expect my father home until supper time this evening. Corn is worth fifty cents a bushel. If you like, and are really desirous of making what amends you can for this highway robbery — I say nothing about your high-handed procedure in the home of a quiet, private citizen — estimate the amount you have taken, leave the money on the table in the kitchen, and return to your camp."

"Why are you afraid to come up into the light and take the money yourself? I assure you I am perfectly harmless, and am only acting under orders from my colonel. It is not highway robbery at all. Our horses must be fed, and we pay for all we get — which is more than can be said of a certain rebel general I know of."

"Well, then, since you must have an answer,

I am so ugly that I do n't let anybody see me when I can help it."

"I do not believe that. Ugliness does not go with a voice like yours."

"All southerners have soft voices, if that is what you mean. Won't you go now and do as I suggested?"

"You arouse my curiosity more and more. There must be some very urgent reason why you so persistently refuse to come upstairs. You have n't any Johnny Rebs hidden away down here, have you?"

"There is n't a rebel general in the house."

"I did n't say rebel generals."

"Oh, from what you remarked a while ago, I assumed it was rebel generals you were after. Well, then, there are no rebels here at all, and I wish you would go away."

"All right, I will go. You will find the money on the kitchen table, unless you change your mind and are on hand yourself to receive it when I return. Meanwhile, won't you change your mind? I want to see you — mighty bad."

Without waiting for a reply to this, Sammy ran lightly up the uncertain steps and hastened out to where his men were gathering the corn. He was young enough to be somewhat excited over his adventure with the girl in the cellar, and his curiosity was unbounded; but he saw no way

of satisfying it, for by no stretch of the imagination could he make it seem that his pursuing of the only course possible for a gentleman conflicted in any way with his duties as a soldier. Much as he should like to probe farther into the little mystery, of what possible use could be the poor little personal secrets of a lone girl to the government of the United States? Plainly, there was nothing left for him to do but to garner his grain, weigh it mentally, and leave the purchase price thereof on the table for the mysterious, sweet-voiced girl who would not come up into the light.

The wagons filled to overflowing, he proceeded painstakingly to estimate the number of bushels they contained. In this his judgment was more to be relied upon than that of many an older and wiser head, for the weary years of his apprenticeship to the cleared cornfields back in Hoosierland when he and Herbert were forced to assume the stature of men, while still but boys, served him well now. To be sure, realizing the pitfalls of mental calculation, and desiring to be absolutely fair to the farmer — further influenced, perhaps, by the pleasing memory of a sweet voice and a tantalizing suggestion of grace of figure in the gloom of the cellar, he erred rather on the side of the owner of the corn than that of the Commissary Department. However, his work

completed at last, he surveyed the well filled wagons with pardonable, boyish pride in his achievement, and thought that General Halleck's chief quartermaster, young Captain Philip H. Sheridan, would be well pleased with this addition to his hard-earned supplies.

Once more arriving at the house, he sat down on the back stoop conscientiously to go over his figures again. Suddenly, he started up in amazement. Voices! Could it be possible? His imagination must be playing him tricks. It had been unusually wrought up since he had chased frantically through the empty house after a rustling of ghostly garments fleeing on before. Nevertheless, he placed his ear close against the door. There were indeed voices carrying on a low-toned conversation, and one of them was the voice of a man. The girl had changed her mind, then, as he had hoped she would do — but how would she explain the presence of the man? Had her father unexpectedly returned, or had he been in hiding all the while? Where, then, if the latter supposition were correct? He sprang to his feet and flung open the door. As he did so, the cumbersome trap door fell into place again and a woman was just disappearing into the next room.

“Stop a moment, if you please!” cried Sammy, commandingly, all romancing and

haunting memory of lilting cadences in a woman's voice lost sight of in the soldier's sterner duty.

"I thought you were not going to insist upon seeing me," replied the young woman, halting upon the inner threshold but without turning her head. "Lay the money on the table."

"You said there was no one else in the house. I know now that you were not telling me the truth. The situation is altogether changed."

"You are mistaken. I did not say there was no one in the house. You were speaking of rebels only. This is a private dwelling and my affairs are — my affairs. You will please go without further foolish argument."

"You certainly gave me to understand that you were alone in the house, even if you did not say so in so many words. As for your affairs, in war time, dear lady, everybody's affairs are the affairs of the United States Government, although I confess I never realized it so fully as when I heard that trap door slam just now."

"Well, say I — lied, then," said the girl, "why do you think I did so?"

"That is exactly what I wish to find out," cried Sammy, eagerly. "More than that, I will find out, so you might just as well turn around and talk this matter over with me. I have fortified myself against the sight of your ugly face."

Without another word, the girl turned and looked at him. Her face was a puzzle to Sammy. It was not a beautiful face but it was so far from plain as to make utterly unwarrantable her assertion of ugliness as an excuse for remaining underground. Her eyes were deep brown, large and clear and steady, and as she gazed unflinchingly at him, there was a question in them. Her soft brown hair was looped over her ears, as was the fashion of that day, and the ends were coiled low on her neck. She was exquisitely neat though her simple frock of brown and white print was faded with many washings and frail with many mendings. There was something about the clear, steadfast gaze, and the indefinable charm of her whole attitude standing quietly upon the inner threshold waiting his will that reminded him someway of little Mary Ann Hamilton of those old days in the backwoods of Indiana. Mary Ann had ever been timid to the point of fleeing frantically from real or imagined danger, until cornered, when she would turn and face her fears as unflinchingly as this shabby young woman had done, and he smiled with reminiscent tenderness, remembering how boldly the bashful child had championed his cause against the school-boy bully, Bob Halstead. Perhaps it was this fleeting resemblance that made her so instantly attractive to Sammy in

spite of her deception, which, after all, was in war time when all is fair.

"What do you wish to ask of me? I told you there was no one here except myself. If you still think there is, you are welcome to continue your brigandish search and to take charge of whomsoever you may find. Why do you not proceed? I am a woman and alone. I cannot enforce my wishes. I wonder you hesitate to carry out your own."

The words were double-edged but Sammy did not wince. Notwithstanding the haunting charm of her fair young face, pale and worn now almost to haggardness, his duty was clearly uppermost in his mind.

"Thank you," he rejoined, promptly. "I shall avail myself of your grudging permission right gladly. I know where he is this time, so you will not be long inconvenienced by my ruffianly behavior. I promise, without solicitation, to be as expeditious as the circumstances will permit," and he stepped briskly toward the trap-door.

The girl threw out her hand in an involuntary gesture of pleading.

"You are right," she said, and for the first time since his discovery of her in the cellar, she was visibly perturbed. "He is down there. Come into the parlor, won't you, and sit down

for a little while? Let us talk it over as you yourself suggested a moment ago. I will tell you who he is and everything I know about him — which is n't much. Please believe me."

"All in good time," said Sammy. "I will just get my man first, if you please. He might slip away while we were discussing him, otherwise."

"You are afraid that I am still deceiving you," replied the girl. "You think I am trying to toll you away so that the man down there may make his escape. You are mistaken, but of course I cannot make you believe that now. Nevertheless, I am not a harbinger of spies, nor of rebel generals, as you seem to think."

She was so slow and deliberate in her speech and movements that Sammy was strengthened in his belief that she had all the while been playing for time. He focused his attention upon the trap-door and smiled with inward satisfaction, remembering the impossible width of the tiny, dust-begrimed window below. "Play away," he thought, indulgently, feeling himself master of the situation.

"You can sit here," continued the girl, placing a chair close to the door leading into the kitchen, which commanded an unobstructed view of the innocent-looking square in the floor. "Then nothing can happen without your knowledge. Are you satisfied?"

"Perfectly." He stepped forward into the adjoining room and sat down. "Now, then, young Miss Homely Woman, you may proceed, but do not be long in the telling. My wagons are ready to start on their way back to camp, and I have no time to lose."

"I suppose you would like to know my real reason for not coming upstairs with you," the girl said, seating herself and tapping the floor with her shapely foot in its worn shoe. "It was on account of — the man, of course."

"Your father?"

"A — friend."

Turning from him, her eyes sought the window, and she allowed her gaze to rest idly for a moment upon the cold, sodden outdoors.

"Oh, what is the use!" she exclaimed, suddenly, rising and walking restlessly over to this same window with its dreary prospect. "He ran away from the Union army. If there were any way out, I would n't tell General Curtis himself — let alone a boy like you. But there is n't — so now you know it all — only that it would be brutal to visit this first offense upon his head. He could n't help it. I know, you see, because —"

"Brutal to courtmartial a cowardly deserter from the Army of the United States?" broke in Sammy, coldly.

"Do n't call names," begged the girl. "There is harshness enough in the world without that. He is so young — he's just like a girl. He said he never could explain why he ran away — he did n't mean to. Something came over him and he just had to go. It was the Guerrillas, you know, and it was his first real experience. His company was out on some detail — and he said when men began to fall around him, he went wild and just turned and ran for his life. He does n't even know how the skirmish came out."

"And how did he happen to come here?" asked Sammy, hating himself for the question, yet urged to it by his desire to ascertain, if possible, for his peace of mind, of how long standing was this alleged friendship between a common deserter and the girl whose indefinable charm had appealed to him so strongly.

She gave him a fleeting glance, and then she smiled a little.

"I do n't know," she said, "unless, perhaps, he thought he might receive help. He needed it — so much."

"But you — why did you run away? Granted your desire to protect your friend, of what possible benefit could that wild chase through this ghostly house be to him. Did n't you realize that, under the mysterious circumstances of a rustling garment floating on before, one would

be a hundred times more apt to prosecute a thorough, systematic search than if you had come naturally to the door when I knocked, and enquired my business?"

She faced him squarely, and then he realized that it was her eyes which had set him a-dreaming of little true-eyed Mary Ann of the backwoods. Unconsciously, he sighed. He had lived long enough already to learn that the friends of one's later and larger life are seldom so stanchly true as were those first ones with whom one played hookey, raided watermelon beds, ate green persimmons, and walked boldly through dark and haunted woods only to scamper back alone in quaking fear of seeing something.

"I hoped you would n't hear me," she said. "I kept hoping maybe you were just pursuing your 'systematic search,' and would desist as soon as you had been all over the house. I did n't want to lie, even for him — unless I had to. I preferred to hide."

"I do not understand yet, however, why you refused to come to the light," he insisted.

"It was this way. When I went into the cellar to hide, this man heard me and undertook to creep out of his place of concealment. He thought perhaps I needed help. He was behind a big pile of boxes and they toppled over on him, pinning him to the ground. I had just started

to dig him out of the wreck when I heard you coming. I did n't know whether he was killed or not — the boxes were so very heavy — but I whispered to him to keep still, and had just time myself to creep behind a box when you came down. I thought you would never go," she continued, naively. "I did so want to find out whether he was injured or not. He was n't hurt a bit — only bruised a little — but of course I did n't know that then. So now you know why I was so anxious for you to go."

"But you knew I would come back. If he had not made himself heard so soon, I should have returned to camp wholly unsuspecting."

"He was determined to 'take his medicine then and there,' as he put it. He would not obey. He came up in spite of all I could do. But I — pushed him back. I was afraid of you."

"Why?"

"You are too young to show mercy, too strong to understand fear."

"How do you know? You are not so very old yourself," retorted Sammy, nettled at this second reference to his youth.

"Women are always older than men."

"Did he tell you to what company he belonged?"

"Yes. It was Company E, Eighteenth Indiana, I think."

“Why, that is my company,” exclaimed Sammy, in surprise. “Of course, Percy Selvin, I might have known! Zack Posey, one of my men, told me about his defection when the skirmish was over — but there are so many stragglers, I had forgotten for the moment. We were taken by surprise — we had thought it too warm for Guerrilla tactics with Curtis’s army on the march — but we came out of it with hardly a scratch ourselves, though we damaged up the other side considerably. Zack said young Selvin acted like a scared rabbit. He turned at the very first shot and hopped for the tall timber in great leaps — for all the world like a hunted cottontail. I never could see a rabbit scurrying for shelter from the hunters without being sorry. I reckon I ’m sort of chicken-hearted — and yet I ’ll have to have him arrested and courtmartialed. I ’m sorry — and surprised, too. He always drilled so well. One would have said he had more than the ordinary makings of a good soldier in him.”

“He ’s so young.” said the girl, musingly. “It seems as if there ought to be some way out of it. Does n’t the army ever give boys another chance? Is n’t there enough of suffering and death without that? This boy cried last night — he so wanted to be brave. You talk about hunted rabbits — but when a man cries, that is the most

sad of all. I knew a boy once who would not run and who would not cry, when all the world would have forgiven him for it. I have never forgotten it. But we can't all be like that, Lieutenant. Some of us need another chance. Your uniform is pretty new as yet," she continued, gravely. "Are you so sure of yourself that you needs must condemn another so soon? To be sure there was that skirmish — but if you were surprised on a lonely picket or should come unexpectedly upon Price's army, do you *know* of yourself that you would not want to run — even though you did n't? Could n't you at least understand the impulse?"

"I am so sure of myself," responded Sammy, with a smile, "that I am *almost* sure, under the conditions you mention, I should make no bones of it whatever, but simply bolt at the first hint of alarm. So it would n't do to be too hard on young Selvin, I reckon. And as Zack and I are the only ones who know anything about his sudden defection, I think we can keep it from the boys and give him his — other chance. Zack has already fathered him on more than one occasion. There's no fear of Zack. So trot out your man, young lady. When the boys see us together, they'll just naturally think I knew where he was all the time."

The girl rose quickly, a pleased light on her

face. She half held out her hand, but repented the impulse and let it fall to her side again.

“And please do n’t be skimpy with his other chance,” she said, earnestly, while her pretty mouth quivered with feeling. “Nor cut it on the bias. Gather it full, Lieutenant, on a double thread — and watch over him a little, won’t you, when the battle comes on, remembering always that we can’t all be battle mad.”

“Call him up!” said Sammy, briefly, almost curtly, conscious again of a feeling of resentment that this girl whom he so romantically discovered should continue to display so great an interest in a common young deserter from the army. Although he himself had been inclined to leniency in dealing with Selvin, yet he had hungered for her approbation; and now, instead of being grateful to him for what he had done, like *Oliver Twist*, she “wanted more.”

She looked at him steadily a moment, and then walked unhesitatingly toward the trap-door. Sammy sprang forward to lift it for her.

CHAPTER XI

THE GUERRILLAS OUT-WITTED

PEERING down into the dark cellar-way, Sammy called in the friendly way he had, "Hello there, Selvin! Come on up! The fight's over."

The girl looked at him reproachfully for the little dig, but he met her glance with one of gay banter.

"How are you, Lieutenant," said the boy, saluting, as he crawled through the opening.

"What have you to say for yourself, Selvin?" asked Sammy, more gravely.

"Nothing, Lieutenant," replied the boy simply. "I went wild when the firing began and ran away — that is all."

The young face was white and drawn from fatigue, exposure, regret, self-reproach, and, possibly, homesickness. He was, in very truth, only a boy in years and experience. His clothes were soiled and torn from his mad rush through mud and bramble and brush to get away from it — the awful horror of the loud, relentless guns. Across his forehead was a purple bruise where

the avalanche of toppling boxes in the cellar had struck him in its descent. Altogether, he was a sorry-looking figure, but he looked at Sammy with no flinching in the brown eyes in which the unconscious pathos of their soft youth, shrinking involuntarily from the swift harbinger of sudden death as shrieked forth by the terrible guns, was the only appeal for mercy. It required heroism to do that, for, to the average soldier, there is no crime so despicable, no affront so unforgivable, no cowardice so utter, as that of a deserter in action; and, in the eyes of Company E, already, Lieutenant Goodman was more than the average soldier, he was the very ideal of a soldier. It took much of courage to look at this young commander unfalteringly.

"This young woman — by the way, Selvin, won't you introduce me? It is almighty awkward to keep saying 'the young woman' all the while —"

"To be sure," interrupted Selvin, quickly. "This is Lieutenant Goodman, Company E, Eighteenth Indiana, Miss —" he paused, in surprised wonder, while the girl broke into a peal of merry laughter.

"How could I ever forget it, when he informed me of that fact himself in such stentorian tones through the barred and bolted door of my castle?" she said, gayly.

"But why it should be considered a subject of ridicule —" began Sammy, aggrieved, but vastly relieved, nevertheless, to learn that Selvin's acquaintance was evidently not of long standing, that, in all probability, it had no date prior to his coming to her dwelling for refuge.

"Oh, please do forgive me," cried the girl, in quick but smiling penitence. "It was not at that I was laughing at all. I was only wondering why Mr. Selvin did not finish his introduction."

"I do n't know your name," explained Selvin, in blushing apology. "You have been so good to me I forgot that you had never told me."

"My name is Brown, Sara Brown," said the girl, quietly.

"On Miss Brown's recommendation," proceeded Sammy, "as well as on account of a belief in you that I hold in spite of your action of yesterday, I have about made up my mind to give you another chance."

"You do n't mean it!" cried Selvin, incredulously. "Oh, if you only would!" The unexpected hope of a reprieve all at once so glorified the face of the young deserter that Sammy was touched and Sara Brown turned away her face to hide the sudden tears. "With you for my leader," continued the boy, joyously, gazing at Sammy almost adoringly, "and *you* — a woman like *you* —" turning to Sara and smiling into

her face as she stood by his side, "to care what I do — or do n't do — I ought to make a brave soldier yet — and I hope some one will shoot me in the back if I betray your confidence." He was speaking to both but he was looking into Sara's eyes as he spoke.

"I know that you will do your duty," she answered the unvoiced pledge, steadily. "I am going to ask your Lieutenant to let me know once in a while how you do it and how you fare. I shall always be interested. I shall never forget you."

"How glad I shall be to do that!" exclaimed Sammy, his heart leaping exultantly at the thought that this girl was not to pass out of his life at once and forever, even though, in carrying out her wishes, he should be seemingly furthering the interests of another man. "And now, Selvin, if anybody asks you where you have been, inform that person that I know where you were. Remember, this is your *chance!*"

The peculiar emphasis placed on the word was brimful of significance, and Selvin involuntarily straightened himself to meet the ultimatum. Sammy did not say *a* chance — one of possible others — just your *chance*, and Selvin understood.

"And I am afraid your opportunity has come sooner than we expected," said Sammy, suddenly

his voice as he spoke assuming the stern, incisive tones of the officer in action. The hoofbeats of horses approaching as rapidly as the heavy roads would permit could now be distinctly heard, and Sammy stepped quickly to the window. "There is no mistake this time. They bear all the hall-marks of Guerrilla gentry, and there is no mean number, either." He crossed the kitchen floor, and, opening the door, looked out in the direction of the departing wagon train. The deserted cornfield lay trampled and forlorn under the cloudy sky. Wagons and men had disappeared around a bend in the road. He breathed a sigh of relief, even while deploring the exigencies of the adventure which had all morning seemed bent upon hindering him from joining his command. Closing the door softly, he rejoined his companions awaiting his directions in trembling speechlessness.

"If they stop for plunder," he said, speaking rapidly, "Selvin and I will take to the cellar and hide there until they go away or until we can plan some means of escape. They will have no reason to suspect our presence, so no doubt we shall be allowed to lie by in quiet. I do not think they will interfere with you in any way, Miss Brown. If they should, I shall not be very far away, you know. Remember that. If they do not stop, then Sel-

vin and I must hasten forward at once. We have simply got to reach my men before the fight is over. We cannot hope to overtake them ahead of these mounted men."

"There are two horses hid in the brush," said Sara, earnestly. She had recovered somewhat of her courage though her heart was still beating very fast indeed. "Take them! The Guerrillas will get them sooner or later anyway, if you do n't."

"How good you are! I will borrow them gladly — if I can only get the chance! It may be just possible then for me to make a detour and reach the wagons before the Guerrillas overtake them."

"They are turning in," the girl whispered, her face blanching a little. She was watching from the window, while Sammy had moved farther back into the room for fear of being seen, which contingency could only result in serious trouble to the Browns for harboring Union soldiers, besides being disastrous to his hopes of being able to rejoin his command before the end.

"Quick, for the cellar, Selvin!" cried Sammy. "It seems to be a decidedly popular place of late. Remember," lowering his voice and letting his glance linger for just one fleeting moment on the clear profile and colorless face of the girl standing so bravely by the window, "I shall be

right at the head of the steps. I shall hear and know — everything. Is your revolver loaded, Selvin?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have a rifle. It hangs behind the door there," said Sara. "I was born and raised in the backwoods. I shall know how to use it."

Glancing at Selvin as he took his arm for the descent, Sammy noticed that the boy had whitened to the very lips and in the luminous brown eyes was the look of a trapped animal.

"Selvin!" he cried, sharply. "This is your chance, boy! For God's sake, brace up! Do just as I say! Do you hear? Just as I say!"

In a moment, the heavy trap-door had closed over their heads. Sara Brown was alone. Almost immediately there was a loud rapping at the door. Sammy, listening, heard her stifle an involuntary gasp of terror before she walked unhurriedly to the door and opened it, and then he heard a harsh voice demand:

"Where is the old man o' the house?"

His head reeled and he was forced to steady himself by grasping Selvin's shoulder, while, with the other hand, he brushed away in the darkness an imaginary film before his eyes. He was living over again the saddest day of his life — and the most terrible. He was not mistaken. The voice was that of Hank Halstead.

"My father is not at home," replied Sara, quietly, to the rough question.

"Where is he?"

"He went to town this morning."

"Mighty lucky thing for him that he was took with that air notion, and he'd better not show up around here agin if he knows what's good for him. It might be jist as well for you to tell him that when you see him. We make this here neighborhood a purty hot place for nigger lovers and sich."

"Yes, I understand that you, and such as you, are too cowardly to go and fight where there is real fighting, but that you bravely make war upon women and children and old men."

Sammy, listening uneasily to the proud, clear voice, now curiously unafraid, and realizing how true was all she said and how such truth always rankled, felt an almost uncontrollable impulse to come forth and shake her for the audacity which could only bring down wrath and probable actual harm upon her head.

"Do n't you go to gittin' too smart, Miss, and above all things, you'd better not let my men hear you talk that away."

"Oh, I have no doubt that they would get together in a body, make a heroic charge upon me and kill me, the dragon, every one of the brave fellows being a veritable St. George." The

flagrant sarcasm in the soft voice caused Sammy to wonder at her courage in silent, though disapproving admiration. "I wonder that you hesitate at all," she went on, "since murder seems to be your occupation in life."

"Them's purty nasty words, my girl, and purty bold as well. You'd better look a leetle out, as I was a-tellin' you before, and you might as well know once and for all that we 'low to have no Union sympathizers sich as you folks be around these here parts. Git a few clothes together and git, for we're goin' to burn the house down right away. There ain't a-goin' to be arny stick o' timber left of arny buildin' 'gin we git through, and you kin thank your stars you're a woman or we'd shoot you down like we would a dawg. If there are any horses in the barn, you kin have one to git out o' the kentry with, if you 'll hurry."

"How magnanimous!"

"Do n't you go to talkin' too much, my lady, or I might accidentally change my mind. Hurry now! If you ain't ready 'gin the time I come back with your horse, you'll jist have to stay and take your medicine. I'll have done all for you I could," and Sammy heard the door slam on his retreating form. It was a welcome sound. He put the weight of his shoulders to the trap and shoved it open.

"It is as I thought," he said, hurriedly, and in a low voice. "You are perfectly safe. They will let you go in peace. I think he would be afraid of a woman's ghost," he interpolated, bitingly and enigmatically. "Come on, Selvin, now's our chance! We haven't a moment to lose. I think we can get to the timber on the other side of the road without being seen as the men all seem to be down at the barn. Good-by, Miss Brown. Hurry, as Hank said, and — I shall see you again."

The boys ran lightly through the hall to the front door and Sammy threw it open to find Hank Halstead standing squarely before the opening with a diabolical grin upon his face, a cocked revolver in his hand.

"My little ruse worked, did n't it?" he began, in disagreeable triumph. "I 'lowed there might be somebody hangin' round. I did n't altogether believe that girl's story, either, 'bout her pap's bein' away. Why — you — Sammy —"

Gradually, his eyes had widened with a dawning fear and horror, and a chalky whiteness spread over his countenance, while a stammering took the place of the swaggering tones of triumph. Recognition had been slower with him than it had been with Sammy. The years had made a man of Sammy Goodman, while he remembered only a boy with a white face, blazing

eyes, and a bleeding leg. Slowly, unconsciously, his arm with its still cocked revolver fell to his side, while he gazed, as if hypnotized, into the face of Gerry Goodman's son. Suddenly realizing his blunder, all too late, he would have whistled for his men, but Sammy foiled any such design by leaping forward and planting a terrific blow squarely in the face of the Guerrilla leader, who fell to the ground like a log.

"Is he dead?" whispered Selvin.

"I do n't know. I hope so," replied Sammy, briefly. "We have n't time to ascertain. Help me pack him into the house," he continued, reverting to the provincialism of his boyhood in the stress of the moment.

They dragged the unconscious man into the house, bound him securely with a clothesline which Sara fetched from somewhere with amazing presence of mind, gagged him and tossed him into a corner.

"You are going to leave him here then?" asked the girl, a strange tone in her voice which caused Sammy to glance at her curiously.

"Of course. There is nothing else to do now. But," suddenly bethinking himself, "not you. You will have to come with us. We dare not leave you after this. Come on, both of you!"

Sara snatched a shawl from a peg on the wall, and the trio slipped cautiously out of the front

door. There was no one in sight. Taking Sara's hand in his and bidding Selvin follow, Sammy led the flight across the road and into the timber on the other side. When they had gone a considerable distance straight toward the heart of the forest, they turned and went parallel with the road, following the direction pursued by Sammy's own men a short time before.

It was dank and cold under the winter-stripped trees, and the dead wet leaves of other years served only to make the sogginess of the unblazed woods trail soggier still. Their way was further impeded by huge, rotting logs which had to be surmounted or gone around. Dead limbs reached up and struck at their faces with vicious pertinacity, or slapped them unexpectedly from above. Briers caught at and tore their clothes. Frequently, they were forced to pause and take bearings, fearful of straying too far from the road and becoming confused as to direction which would be disastrous in the cloudy state of the weather. Presently, it set in to rain, and then to snow, and the wind grew keener. Determined not to be a hindrance, Sara Brown pressed her lips together and trudged along, stubbornly refusing all offers of help, though her feet were wet and cold, and the shawl, only partially covering her slim, girlish form in its thin, cotton gown, was pitifully inadequate to

the requirements of the cutting wind which howled mournfully through the bare trees. Once, she tripped over a treacherously hidden branch of a fallen tree and fell to the muddy ground, where she lay, too wet and chilled and momentarily discouraged to summon the ambition necessary for arising immediately. She was a pitiful looking object huddled there upon the ground, and Sammy's heart smote him. But he had to compel her to go on. There was no other way.

"I can't go a step farther — and I won't," she declared, mutinously, when Sammy stooped to lift her. "I know the way back. I'll just wait till those bushwhackers have passed and then go home by the road like a civilized being."

"Hardly," said Sammy. "When they discover what we have done to their leader, they will have no mercy left for you. Do hurry, Miss Brown! Every instant of delay is dangerous! We'll help you, Selvin and I."

He took hold of one arm while he was speaking, motioned for Selvin to take the other, and gently but firmly pushed her forward. When he felt her shiver, he hastily divested himself of his army overcoat and wrapped it securely around her in spite of her protests. Tears of vexation came into her eyes when she found she could not move him. Her pride rebelled — her obligations were becoming so manifold.

"Never you mind — I'll get even for this some time," she said, childishly, defiantly. "I'll show you I'm not a child to be carried hither and yon and wrapped in swaddling clothes whether I will or not, at the whim of anybody or everybody who happens along. Remember that!"

"I'll remember," promised Sammy. "Meanwhile, I think we had better get into the road again. We've passed the big bend, I think, and must be nearly up with the wagons. They have to move so tarnationally slow. I don't want to run any risk of passing them — perhaps traveling will be easier, too. The Guerrillas may delay indefinitely, or they may not come this way at all. They will spend some time in trying to locate the direction pursued by the assailants of their worthy leader."

It was easier traveling by the road; though the mud, newly lubricated by the fresh fall of sleet and drizzling rain, was deeper and stickier than in the woods, their way was now free from the many other obstacles which there beset their trail, and they pressed forward with renewed energy. Presently, rounding another bend, they were overjoyed to see the men and wagons not more than three hundred yards on ahead, but the next moment relief was swallowed up in alarm by the sound of galloping hoofbeats in their rear. Sammy ran swiftly back to the turn

of the road to reconnoiter. A considerable band of mounted men was bearing down hard upon them.

“And it is I — I — who am delaying you, and have been all along,” cried Sara, when he had returned and given his report. “And now they will overtake us after all, and you will be killed before you have a chance to fight with your men. Run! Oh, do run! Leave me! I will come as fast as I can. They will not hurt me. Please! Please!”

But that her pleading was futile, she knew all the time from Sammy’s half smile of almost amused dissent. And then before she realized what was coming, or had time to expostulate, the two young men picked her up bodily and ran forward, exerting all the strength they had in their lithe young bodies. As soon as his voice could be distinctly heard and understood, Sammy cried out in command, and, with a rousing cheer, the plucky little fraction of a company halted and formed in perfect discipline before the wagons.

The Guerrillas had espied Sammy on his little journey of reconnoissance and they swung round the bend with yells of anticipatory triumph. They checked their horses in surprised confusion, however, at the unexpected sight of a force of Union soldiers lined up in waiting. Although

they outnumbered Sammy's little command, they did not seem inclined to fight, and, after a few preliminary shots had been interchanged, they wheeled and galloped back.

The boys were all palpably curious about the young woman their commander was so absorbedly engaged in trying to make comfortable in one of the loaded wagons, but army discipline forbade question or comment. Zack, especially, was non-plussed, and stared with round eyes and dropped chin; and then, moving forward to offer his own coat, slowly, he grinned. He was thinking of the southern beauties Sammy had said he was free to love; and then, his smile grew wistfully tender, for from Sammy's possible love affair, his thought naturally turned to old Aunt Salina Haskin's granddaughter Susie.

CHAPTER XII

A NIGHT ADVENTURE

WHEN the foraging party arrived at the camp, the early dusk was beginning to creep over the valley of the Osage. Night was closing in damp and cloudy, but the rain had temporarily ceased. It grew so clammily cold that the indications were for a freeze, unless the rain began again, which would only serve to further incapacitate the roads for the passing of the army. The ruts and only partially frozen hummocks would make marching a veritable martyrdom, and yet the Division was preparing to resume its march in the morning. Sammy, inquiring the cause for the fever of unrest and excitement which seemed to pervade the atmosphere of the entire encampment, learned that the army was to pull stakes and cross the river at daybreak and press forward to join Curtis at Lebanon.

In front of the company mess tent, the company officers' servant, a sleek, voluble, northern darkey, especially attached to the service of the Captain, and who, in fact, had accompanied that

officer to the front, soon had a big camp-fire blazing and crackling for the benefit of Sammy and his strange and unexpected guest. They were both chilled to the marrow, and the grateful warmth of the leaping flames was as good to them as water to the thirsty or as manna to the starving; and when the delicious warmth was followed by the gracious, appetizing odor of broiling bacon and bubbling coffee, a homey, comforting, dreamy languor of utter content stole over Sammy's senses, such as he had not known since that memorable day when the Eighteenth marched away with colors flying, bands playing, crowds cheering. If the presence of the sober-faced, rather frightened, but plucky, sweet-eyed girl in the wet, drooping, print gown, did not have somewhat to do with this new feeling of rest, at least it did not detract from it. Even the simmering and sputtering of the water-soaked sticks thrown into the glowing heart of the fire, there to dry and finally to burn, had a soothing sound, and the gloomy, darkening sky, now almost black against the gleaming sparks shooting upward, seemed to shut them in from war and the terrors that haunt its beginning and stalk in its wake. Presently, as Sammy stared dreamily into the red coals, or indolently watched the efficient darkey deftly transfer strips of smoking, dripping bacon from the point of a long

green stick to the plate, a figure sauntered into the mellow glow of the camp-fire from the gloom of the shadows without, the stocky figure of a private soldier, the figure of Zack. He did not accost his superior — it was as if he had not seen him. He warmed his hands by the fire a moment, and then walked unconcernedly away, back into the darkness. But before he disappeared from the circle of light, he slipped something into the servant's hands, something clumsily wrapped in paper. There was nothing showing that might in any way betray the secret of the contents of the package. The darkey unwrapped it curiously, while Sammy looked on with twinkling eyes of intuitive understanding, and then with a knowing wink held it out for the Lieutenant to see. It was a piece of fresh pork.

"I ought to report the rascal," said Sammy, shaking his head dubiously over the treasure displayed in the colored man's outstretched hands, "but I do n't see how I can. I have n't the heart. What would you do, Miss Brown?"

"I'd eat the pork," said Sara, so promptly that Sammy laughed.

"That advice is even sounder and more to the point than was Mr. Dick's famous reply to Betsey Trotwood when she asked him what she should do with David: 'I should wash him.' No sooner said than done — except to allow time for

the cooking. Trot out the frying pan, LeRoy! If the Captain comes in, we'll invite him to the feast. And now, Miss Brown, what am I going to do with you?"

She was ready with her answer.

"Let me sit by your fireside till I'm dry, it won't be long now, your LeRoy has been so generous with the wood, give me a sip of your coffee, and a bite to eat, and then manage a passport for me someway so that I may leave your lines without being hung as a spy," she said, smilingly, but seriously, too, "and then I will say good-by and — you have been very good to me. I feel like a thief taking bread from the very mouths of hungry soldiers, but it's seven miles to Linn where I purpose to spend the night, and — I am so hungry. I have n't eaten anything since breakfast, you know. I'll try to restrain my appetite, which is enormous."

"And will your father find you there?" he asked, gravely.

Instantly, her face clouded, but she only replied, thoughtfully:

"Some time, of course. I do n't know how soon. He will be very much worried. But I could n't go home now, could I? Nothing will be left there, and our neighbors have all gone away."

"You have friends in Linn?"

She shook her head slowly.

"Not close friends — but there will be some one to take me in. We have been rather lonely since we came to Missouri."

After a cozy silence, "Thank you," she said to the negro, LeRoy, with a winning smile, as he handed her deferentially a tin plate piled high with the best that his culinary genius could produce out of his limited stock. Black LeRoy did not have to be told, in spite of the storm-stained frock and the strangeness of her presence alone in an officer's tent with night coming on, that this girl was not one of the ordinary camp followers, those parasitic cancers who abounded even in that day of awful stress.

After supper, Sammy sought the Colonel again, and, after narrating in detail the story of the day's adventures and explaining the presence of the young woman with his company, he obtained permission to escort her to Linn, with the loan of two horses, providing he would be back before the Division moved at daybreak. It was a somewhat risky undertaking, fraught with much of uncertainty, and the Colonel chafed under the awkwardness of the situation, but as Linn was at present well within the limits of Union protection, with the farming districts friendly, bitterly resentful of the recent raids of Price's army, and, also, as Sammy was respect-

fully determined, the harassed regimental commander finally gave his consent, and Sammy departed happy.

Just as they were preparing to slip quietly away, it began to rain again, and as Sammy was casting about for some better means of protection for his charge than her scant shawl afforded, there was the ubiquitous Zack stammeringly offering his cloak again with somewhat of the same feeling of championing those whom Sammy favored as prompted him to choose little Mary Ann Hamilton first at that long ago spelling match. Sara accepted the courtesy and the assured comfort as well graciously.

"Thank you, Mr. Zack. I hope I shall see you again some day. You won't forget Mr. Selvin, will you? I understand you have sort of adopted him. Lieutenant Goodman will bring back your coat. Good-by."

The roads were execrable. The horses, encumbered only with their riders, fared little better than had those with the heavily loaded wagons earlier in the afternoon. The dark had settled down like a blanket, smothering in its dense impenetrability, and the fine stinging rain smote their faces with an icy sharpness. Talking, under the circumstances, required too great an effort to be indulged in to any extent, and, after a few desultory remarks now and then,

they relapsed into silence when nothing was to be heard but the beat of the wind, the swish of the rain, and the splash of the horses' hoofs through the wet, muddy roads, as they threaded the black night.

"I think we must be nearly to the creek," said Sara, when they had ridden in one of these silences for what seemed an interminable length of time. "We have to ford it. There has never been a bridge, but the water will be high after these rains. Are the horses reliable?"

"They are army horses — poor things," replied Sammy, commiseratingly. "If experience counts for anything, trust them for anything short of the ocean or the frozen summits of Mont Blanc."

"It's not very far from home," said Sara, wistfully. "I wish we might go around that way and see if father is there."

"The Colonel's orders are very strict," rejoined Sammy, regretfully. "No side issues and camp by daylight. If the roads keep on getting worse as they have been all the way, I have n't a moment to lose."

They had proceeded but a short distance farther, when, from out the darkness somewhere, unlocatable because of the black nothingness of all else, even directions, came the sound of voices, subdued yet unmistakably human voices.

"It sounds as if they were at the ford," whispered Sara, a little catch of apprehension in her voice.

"Now, could it be those Guerrillas again?" muttered Sammy, more to himself than to his companion. "Waiting until daylight to cross the creek? To be sure, we might have known they would n't cross the river ahead of our army. They will come afterward — like vultures. We could n't have missed the road, could we?"

Presently a light flickered forth in the darkness, just a tiny gleam, and it shone as if through trees or underbrush, but it was a stationary light. It flickered and danced and smoldered at the sport of the wind and rain, but it did not move to and fro as would a lantern or a torch. It was plainly a camp fire.

"They are going to camp there for the night," whispered Sammy. "That settles it as far as we are concerned, I'm afraid. We could n't pick another crossing in the night. It's blacker than a stack of black cats. You must be acquainted somewhat hereabouts. Is n't there some one with whom you could stay over night and who would see you safely to Linn in the morning?"

"The Blackburns live over to our right a ways, but we'll have to go back a mile or two, as I remember, to take the cross-road."

"We will go there then; but first, let me make

sure that it is necessary — that they are not friends. Do n't move — hold my horse steady — there are doubtless pickets. Whatever you do, be still!"

He slipped cautiously from his horse and crept noiselessly forward straight toward the yellow gleam yonder in the darkness. That was a bad moment for Sara Brown, surrounded by the black night, the stinging storm, enemies, and armies; behind her, a razed homestead; before her, what? And she was alone in it all. What would happen to her if Lieutenant Goodman did not come back? But Sammy was not gone long, and her relief was intense when she felt rather than saw him swing silently into the saddle.

"We must go back," he whispered, his hand on her bridle rein to guide the reversed order of things. "We won't even whisper any more. Voices are the very dickens for carrying."

When they arrived at the Blackburn farm, a light was shining through the blinds of the front windows indicating the presence of some one who had not yet retired for the night. They dismounted and Sammy crept cautiously up to the windows, but the blinds were drawn close and he could see nothing.

"I am sure it is all right; some of the family are at home," said Sara, in a low voice, her face showing white with fatigue through the dim sug-

gestion of light filtering through the curtained window. "I am going to knock at the door now. I know they will take me in."

But Sammy forestalled her intention by pushing her gently behind him, the soldier's instinct prescribing caution even in the house of friends. If there should be unsuspected trouble, his to bear the brunt of it, not this gentle girl's who had come to rely upon him since that first distrust which had carried her on swift feet to the cellar. He rapped lightly.

"Who is there?" a low voice responded.

"It is I, Sara Brown, Mr. Blackburn," the girl called, clearly, stepping forward, and Sammy gave way, assuming that she had recognized the voice. "Won't you let me in? So much has happened —"

The door opened before she had finished her sentence, and, with a piercing scream, Sara cowered back and then sank unconscious into Sammy's ready arms. Hank Halstead and a number of other men stood in the lighted interior with revolvers leveled at the door.

"Come right in, Miss Brown. Glad ter see you. Come right in, I say. Do n't hold it agin me 'cause I did n't git your horse like I promised. I was — unavoidably detained, eh, Sammy? Come in ter our hospitable home, both o' you."

Without an instant's hesitation, Sammy

stepped over the threshold carrying Sara in his arms. There was a bed in one corner of the room, four-posted, high with its voluminous feather-tick, immaculately clean and tidy as befitted a "settin' room" bed, covered with a closely quilted, patch-work counterpane, and here he laid his burden.

"Bring some water, somebody, she has fainted!" he ordered, and Hank himself hurried forward with a brimming dipper.

"Poor little girl," whispered Sammy, softly, paying no more attention to the grinning faces surrounding them than if he and Sara had been alone in the universe. "It is awful to be a woman in war time. You have been so brave all day. I wonder you stood the strain so long. Poor little girl, poor little girl." He was smoothing her forehead gently, caressingly, as he spoke, pushing back the rain-wet hair from the closed eyes.

Presently, she opened them and looked up into his face for a moment as if trying to recollect something.

"What is it, Sammy," she whispered, inquiringly, like a child, her hand clutching his coat sleeve in the vague fear of the unknown, and then, as he would have soothed her, she gave a little frightened gasp of understanding. "Oh, do n't leave me," she begged, in terror. "Do n't

leave me with those dreadful men! The Colonel will forgive you when you tell him how all alone I was."

"You need not be afraid that I will leave you here alone," Sammy promised, unconscious of the grim irony of the assurance in his desire to comfort her; and then to further calm her terror, he asked, smilingly, still absolutely ignoring the presence of the Guerrillas, "How did you know that my name was Sammy? That is what they call me back in Indiana."

"I think I must have heard someone call you that — your friend, Zack, most likely, or maybe that Guerrilla leader, he seems to know you. Forgive me — I did not think what I was saying."

At that moment, a man hurried into the room from outside and the rest, who had relaxed their vigilance and were lounging carelessly about when it had been ascertained beyond doubt that the young infantry lieutenant and the girl were really alone, hastily secured their arms and sprang to attention.

"What is it, Dan?" asked Hank, quickly.

"A company of Union soldiers on the road coming this way. They are distant not more than a half mile."

"Cavalry or infantry?"

"Cavalry."

“Then we have n’t a minute to lose. Fellows, what shall we do with the prisoners? The Feds won’t stay long when they find nobody here and rations all et up even to skins and bones. What ol’ Blackburn did n’t make way with his ownse’f before his sudden call to leave the kentry by polite invitation, we managed to dispose of our ownse’ves. Here, boys, bind these here prisoners and gag ’em and put ’em down cellar. They ’ll be safe if you ’re pertic’lar ’bout the gags.”

His instructions were carried out to the letter, while Sammy looked on in helpless rage, chafing sorely under the restraint of honor — honor to his country and honor to an unprotected daughter of his country — which forbade his pursuing his private quarrel with this man and leaping at his throat, regardless of consequences to himself if only the fiend in human shape who had put out the life of Gerry Goodman might writhe in the dust and die.

“All’s fair in war, ye know, Sammy,” said Hank, with an atrocious grin, as the gagged and bound young man was being borne to the now open and waiting trap in the floor, “and I do n’t hold it agin you that you knocked me down over yander to old man Brown’s and left me. I ’low I ’d o’ done the same to you if I ’d o’ had the chanct — like I ’m a-doin’ now. Bye, bye, Sammy, we won’t be gone long!”



Sammy looked on in helpless rage

Lying side by side on the damp and musty floor of the dark cellar, Sammy and Sara could hear the shuffling of feet overhead as the men hurriedly left the house, and then the muffled beat of hoofs as they rode away, the sound gradually growing fainter and fainter until it could no longer be distinguished from the souging of the wind so that they did not know when they ceased to hear it. For Sara, there followed a moment of blank despair, but Sammy's heart was thrilling high with hope. Surely, surely, there would be some way of acquainting those Federal cavalymen of their presence in the supposedly deserted house. He racked his brain in the effort to think of a way, never ceasing for a moment, meanwhile, his laborious attempts to loosen his gag or the rope that manacled his hands and feet; and while he worked, there came the clatter of hoof beats which came to an orderly halt outside the door. A number of men dismounted and entered the house.

"Hello! Hello! Anybody here?" some one of them called out. "If there is, he evidently does n't intend to say anything about it. Confound it, it is as dark as Egypt in here!"

The Guerrillas had evidently extinguished the light before riding away, but the soldiers must have succeeded in securing one for soon the same voice continued:

“ From the looks of things, somebody has been here very recently, but, also, from the looks of things, I see no chance of getting anything to eat either for man or beast, so we might as well move on.”

Sammy's heart sank within him at the words, and as the men left the house, he grew desperate and tugged and strained with all the strength he possessed. He realized that the Guerrillas would return as soon as the soldiers were far enough away to insure safety for such a procedure; and he knew further that with Hank Halstead as leader neither he nor Sara need hope to be treated with even the ordinary decency of prisoners of war. In the first place, the Guerrilla bands were accountable to no one — their own will was their own law. In the next place, he felt that Hank Halstead would consider no atrocity too low for him to resort to in order not only to put out of the way enemies of the southern cause, but to silence effectually that past which had been in such imminent danger of speaking out loud ever since the unexpected encounter at the Browns' front door. A cold sweat broke out all over his body. He was so helpless, so helpless, and the girl whom he had taken in and fed and warmed and comforted at his own fireside was — so sweet. Was there nothing he could do for her? Must she suffer all of it — all

— ah, God, the thought was not to be endured. He thought of Mollie and the little Ama Jane, and how their lives had been shadowed for all time by the same murderous hand which now threatened this other girl who had come into his life. When the sound of the last faint hoof-beat had died away in the distance, he made one last frantic effort to tear himself loose from the thongs that bound him — only to fall back weak and panting from exhaustion, helpless, hopeless, despairing utterly.

How long he lay there, he never knew, but it could not have been very long, for when once more he was roused from that lethargy of weakness and exhaustion by the insistent repetition of the sub-conscious thought that the so-called bush-whackers might return at any moment, there was still no sound of their coming. He had been granted a short reprieve in which to think — to think — to think — if only — perhaps he might —. He wormed himself around until he could rest his head on the first step of the rude stairway and experienced a faint thrill of hope. If only they would stay away awhile longer — just a little while! He rubbed the back of his head back and forth across the edge of the step, back and forth, back and forth, until he was dizzy and sick from the exertion; but at last, to his great joy, he felt the bandage begin to loosen,

and finally it slipped down from his mouth. In a voice of passionate relief, he whispered what he had done and told Sara to be of good cheer and to hope on. He next wormed himself over toward her, whispering to her to lie on her side with her back toward him, and succeeded, by almost superhuman effort, in undoing with his teeth the knot which bound her hands, straining every faculty of hearing, meanwhile, in listening for returning hoof-beats to sound through the deadening rain and sleet. At his direction, she then felt quickly in his pocket and secured his jack-knife. The rest was easy. In a moment, they were free, cold and cramped and unsteady, but free with the blessed freedom of hands and feet and voice.

With all the haste compatible with their cramped condition, they climbed the rickety stairs and fled to the out-of-doors. Their horses, of course, were gone; but they themselves were unfettered, and out where the night was very dark and the world very large, and Sammy's soul sang an exultant *Te Deum*.

"There is another family a mile or so up the road," whispered Sara, "with whom I could stay unless they, too, have fled the country."

"You are so tired!" murmured Sammy.

"Not any more — not out-doors," insisted Sara, pluckily, so they started up the road.

They had proceeded but a short distance when they were compelled to creep into the deeper shadows of the trees bordering the road to let a company of horsemen pass by, and they watched them silently as they turned into the way leading to the house so lately vacated.

"We didn't get away from there any too soon," muttered Sammy, and again they hastened forward.

To their infinite relief, they found the family at home this time and very friendly. Sammy's orders, however, forbade his acceptance of the hospitality urged upon him by the good people of the house, and he merely lingered long enough to assure himself that Sara would be perfectly safe and comfortable in her new environment before setting out on his return journey. There was not a horse left on the place. These had all been confiscated either by regular troops or by Guerrillas. In this dilemma, Sammy was at a loss to know what to do. On foot, he realized that his chances for reaching camp by daybreak were very slight. But desperate straits demand desperate remedial measures. Suddenly, a daring thought flashed through his brain. It squared his shoulders and lighted his eyes, so that Sara, walking to the gate with him to bid him God-speed, asked, wonderingly:

"What is it? What are you going to do?"

"Never mind — now. I'll tell you some day — if I live."

At the gate, she slipped out of Zack's rough army cloak, and he took it silently.

"Can you manage it?" she asked, softly, unmindful of the dash of cold rain that drenched her. "I wonder if I could n't find a way to send it back tomorrow? It will hinder you so. If you only had a horse —"

"Do n't worry about me — I can manage it," he replied, abruptly.

"Good by," she said, holding out her hand. "Good by, and thank you for — everything. It seems such a trivial word, sometimes, does n't it — thank you — considering that we use it on any and every occasion, from saving life to — passing the bread. But we have no other, so — *thank you* and good by."

He had taken the proffered hand and still held it silently. When she would have withdrawn it, he drew her to him quickly and kissed her on the lips.

"Good by," he said, "but I shall see you again. I am coming back. I will write to you at Linn to let you know how Selvin gets along. Good-by!"

He looked longingly for a moment down into the grave, startled eyes, kissed her again, released her, and hurried down the road. When he looked back, pulses throbbing riotously, she was still

standing there in the rain and sleet, faintly outlined against the dim glow of light that reached her from the open doorway.

Sammy reasoned that the Guerrillas would without doubt jump to the conclusion that the soldiers had released the prisoners, but he could not know whether or not for other reasons they might still linger around the house for any length of time. Undoubtedly, they had kept close track of the movements of the little troop of cavalry and would therefore have no fear of being trapped. When he came to the turn in the road, he could see a light in the house and hear voices outside and the moving of horses. Now was the time come to put into execution the wild, exceedingly hazardous plan which had flashed through his mind awhile back, daring all on one bold move which would mean everything or nothing, camp by daybreak or destruction.

The house was surrounded by trees, a large grove of them, and, slipping from tree to tree so as to keep a thick trunk ever between him and possible surprise, he crept forward, maintaining a sharp outlook all the time for sentinels. Coming closer, he could dimly discern horses tied to trees and men moving about. Some were on the ground holding their horses, others were mounted, lounging carelessly in their saddles. As he stood motionless, awaiting his chance, scarcely breath-

ing in the intensity of his desire to escape notice, a man opened the door and a stream of light was sent out over the graveled walk. After closing the door behind him, the man walked up to one of the horses, untied it and mounted, leisurely enough and yet with decision, too, and then stood as if waiting. It looked to Sammy as if a general move was imminent only awaiting the advent of some one, Halstead probably, and he decided that he dare not delay longer. He stepped quietly but boldly up to one of the horses, unfastened the bridle strap without undue haste, and swung into the saddle, gambling on the mere chance that if noticed at all in the deep gloom of the night, he would be taken merely for a comrade mounting his own animal as others were doing, the very boldness of the design exempting him from suspicion.

He edged away quietly little by little until completely lost in the gloom of the trees and the outer dark, and then walked his mount back to the main road. Reaching it unobserved, he suddenly spurred up his newly acquired property and raced back over the way he and Sara Brown had so lately traveled.

There was a hint of approaching dawn in the sky when he reached camp, and the army was already in movement, getting ready to cross the Osage at daybreak.

CHAPTER XIII

SAMMY ACQUIRES JOHN

IT WAS in the air — battle. Sammy felt it, Zack felt it, Curtis's whole army felt it. Many times before had they thought real fighting was imminent during the long, fragmentary, disappointing, cruelly wearisome campaign in pursuit of Price; but this was different, somehow. Then they had merely thought; now they felt. Apparently, to the rank and file at least, there were no more indications of an approaching fierce struggle than there had been divers times before; and yet, there it was — sobering men's faces, filling their pockets with loving letters to the folks at home, just in case it should come, without warning, when there might be no more time. The War of the Rebellion was too young then for the soldiers to laugh and jest with death on the eve of battle as more seasoned veterans would have done — as they themselves did later on. There it was — the prescience — with no more reason for it than that the air was surcharged with it, and the men could no more escape the infection than they could help breathing in the

air that harbored it. And yet when it came — Pea Ridge — it came as a surprise. The way of it and the time of it and the place of it were not as any one had thought or planned. How they had longed for it — all those splendid young volunteers assigned to the Army of the Southwest! None more than the Eighteenth Indiana! No one more than First Lieutenant Samuel Goodman of Company E! Sitting in a small blacksmith shop, however, three miles to the south of camp, in charge of a picket guarding the telegraph road, in momentary expectation of being gobbled up, Sammy was not so eager for the approach of the enemy as he had been.

They had driven Price from Springfield and had forced him back upon the boasted rebel stronghold of Cross Hollows with scarcely more than a complimentary exchange of shots between their advance and the Confederate rear guard protecting Price's retreat. The pet plan of compelling Price to resign all hope of bagging Missouri into the net of Secession by driving him from the state was accomplished. By a masterly flank movement, they had even compelled the Confederates to vacate that supposedly impregnable position at Cross Hollows — and the men had so counted on a big, decisive battle there! When Curtis decided that it would not be prudent to pursue Price into the Boston Mountains,

Davis's Division had been ordered to move back to Sugar Creek, a distance of about twenty miles. Here was the telegraph road which must be held in order that communication might be maintained with Springfield and Rolla and over which supplies must come, besides being the line of retreat if retreat were necessary. Two or three days later, General Van Dorn took command of the rebel forces, and on March fourth, General Curtis learned that he had concentrated many of the scattered Confederates and was marching to meet him. General Curtis immediately sent orders to all his outlying troops, scattered many miles apart in order to subsist in so far as possible on the country, to concentrate at Sugar Creek, and he himself hastened thither with General Carr's Division.

It was the morning before his arrival that Sammy was sent out on picket duty in command of fifty men. An unconscionable distance it was, too, three miles from camp. It made the shivers run down his back to think of it — all the more so on account of that prescient battle atmosphere pervading the whole army. The only cavalry with Davis's Division was the First Missouri, with Curtis somewhere in the neighborhood of Cross Hollows, which had necessitated the throwing out of the infantry picket line at this unusual distance from camp, there being no

vedettes to patrol the outer reaches. Sammy, still nervously conscious of disagreeable, premonitory shivers down his back, established his headquarters at a small country blacksmith shop just west of the main road and across from a farmhouse. The road ran through a field comprising twenty or thirty acres, on every side of which was thick forest. To the left, was rough, broken land bordering Sugar Creek Ravine; a mile or so to the right was the Bentonville road, and to picket the distance between, nearly a mile, was Sammy's duty.

He threw out his men on duty line just south of the clearing, on both sides of the road; dividing the reserves so that the outstanding pickets would be relieved every two hours, as usual. When evening approached, he retired to the dull glow of the fire builded in the forge of the deserted blacksmith shop, there to wait and dream the night away in the waking dreams which, when day comes, seem even more unreal and fantastic than real dreams, those airy children of legitimate slumber. It was snowing again — it almost seemed as if one might say it was still snowing — a cold, clinging, spring snow that fell steadily all the night long from an inky sky. It was a harsh night for under-fed and under-clothed soldiers, exhausted from their long, wearisome campaign, with only the meagre comforts of a

resourceless camp at the tail end of a trying campaign; for the solitary men arduously patrolling the rough, broken wooded line between Sugar Creek and the Bentonville road, it was cruel. Even the bluffs adjoining Sugar Creek were densely tree-studded, and so much heavy timber engendered a curious, trapped feeling, so that one was conscious of fostering a fierce desire to thrash one's arms out and break away — just to see if one could. Even to Sammy, woods born and bred, such an impulse came, though he laughed it away. He was conscious of an odd, stifled sensation, which reminded him of a night when he and Zack were boys and a ghost had walked the woods at home.

It was as if the ghosts of all who had already died for the southern cause were met to jeer at the lonely, slender young fellow sitting in the gloomy, weather-beaten, deserted shop, in the dead of night, away down in the heart of the enemy's country, while they waited in gloating glee for the first tramp, tramp, tramp, of the mighty, reinforced armies of Van Dorn. Countless times, Sammy imagined that sound during the seemingly endless night, well knowing that if the rebel horde did come marching up the road from the south, the chances were all too sure that rebel cavalry would cut off the retreat and gobble up the little command before it had time to

fire once and die. Ah, well, that was a picket's duty — to give warning to the encamped army of the approach of the enemy — to shoot and run — and if grim fate decreed *shoot and die*; so be it, if only all might be well with the army. It could never be said of the death of a picket, however obscure and unknown, that it was the death of a coward or a deserter. It would be a lonely death, and it was man's little weakness to want to die, if die he must, in the thick of the fight where the roar of the cannon, the blur of smoke, the surge of men — his fellows — and the glimpse of the colors through rifts in the enveloping, low-lying, pungent powder smoke, crowned him with the inestimable gifts of the battle madness; so that physical dread was swallowed up in a strange exaltation of spirit. That was the glory of war, as old man Carmichael had so often and so glowingly portrayed it to the thrilled hearts of boys gathered around the fireplace of a winter's night. It was one with the "pomp and circumstance" of war, of which the cheers of the multitude, the beating of drums, and the fluttering of flags and handkerchiefs had played so important a part when the boys marched away to the front. But the lonely death of a lonely picket when fear had stalked by his side all the lonely night through — that was one with real war, naked, ugly war, a part with the

screams of the frightfully wounded, the heart-clutching jabbering of the fever-stricken or the pain-and-thirsty-mad, the pitiful moaning of the dying, the awful quiet of the dead; and that is the side of war which abides longest in the thoughts of a picket. But, after all, Sammy's thoughts ran on, it would be no lonelier a death, perhaps, than Gerry Goodman had been called upon to endure — and all death is lonely enough; one meets it alone, and one goes out with it alone.

Again and yet again, gazing into the dull fire with sombre eyes, listening to the soft, continuous pelting of the snow against the dim and dirty window frames, while idle anvil and hammer, odd wheels, piles of rusty horse shoes, and empty kegs, rising dimly out of the gloom, presented strange and fantastic shapes, his mind dwelt on thoughts of the cold, hungry, weary, and solitary boys out on that lonely picket line, tramping back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, over the rough ground, no fire for warmth or cheer, no companion but the pitiless night. From them and him and their plight if the reported concentrated armies of the South did come that night, his thoughts wandered to the probable fate of the army under such a condition. A mere fraction of an army it was, not more than ten thousand men in all, perhaps, right in

the midst of the enemy's country, one road only open to relief, retreat, or supplies, a devastated and starved region round about, army-ridden and plucked until mule steak threatened to become a popular delicacy. Rumor, aided and abetted by imagination, pictured an overwhelming force steadily marching up the road from the South. Poor little army of the Southwest! Suppose Davis could not hold the telegraph road till Curtis came in the morning! It would be cut off, trapped, surrounded, swallowed up, literally shot to pieces and left to rot in this God-forsaken pocket of the enemy's country. And then he thought of the folks at home, of his toil-worn and saddened mother, of the little sisters patiently doing his chores and Herbert's of a cold, gray morning before the sun was up or by lantern light of a night of early dark, and of how they must keep on doing them forever and forever if Herbert and he never came back, and he thought of that splendid big brother, an army surgeon now, fulfilling his high calling somewhere out at the front.

A little past midnight, he was called out upon the line. It was nearly time for a change of shift. The sentinel was weary-eyed and pinched with cold but he had not slept at his post. He was greatly excited and Sammy experienced a momentary heart-throb of apprehension. The

man acted as if he had halted the advance guard of the whole rebel army. He explained that he had heard nothing, seen nothing, had no warning whatsoever of the approach of any living creature until this nigger boy had risen like a spectre in his path so suddenly and unexpectedly that he had nearly stumbled over him. The boy could not give the countersign, and he had called the corporal of the guard, who, in turn, could get no satisfaction out of the trembling culprit more than the oft-repeated and stumbling statement that he had something to tell, so they had considered it a matter for the Officer of the Guard's personal attention.

It was not unusual for colored people, even at that early date, to flock to the Union armies for protection and the hope of freedom, gloriously unhampered by any fear or fret of tomorrow's bread, deeply distilled in the faith that "de Linkum sogers" could and would do anything; but this stealing up in the dead of night of one solitary, shivering, speechless, not yet grown lad of seventeen years or thereabouts was unusual to say the least. Most of his kind had been delightfully frank, airily unconcerned over questions of the wherewithal to feed and clothe and house this troublesome swelling of numbers with no corresponding gain in fighting power, to say nothing of possible qualms as to harboring

runaway slaves in contempt of property rights, communicative to garrulity, touchingly unafraid and trusting. This boy was seemingly secretive, unfriendly, afraid. But Sammy, noting the slightness of the thinly clad, shivering form standing just beyond the point of the sentry's bayonet, relented toward him somewhat for being the direct cause of his being routed out on such a bitter night on what would doubtless prove to be but a wild goose chase.

"Poor devil," he said, commiseratingly, in an undertone. "He does n't look very dangerous."

Aloud, he demanded, more sharply than he felt, "What are you doing here at this time of night?" and the boy sensed the authority at once and met it with the unquestioning docility of his race.

"Please, sah, I 's run away."

"Run away? And from whom?"

"From de 'Fed'rate Army, please, sah."

"Where was the Confederate Army?"

The boy hesitated. "Is you de Ginerel?" he asked, at last, looking artlessly up into Sammy's face.

"General who?" Sammy counter-questioned.

"De Ginerel ob de Union Army?"

"Why, no, John — if that is n't your name, it 'll do as well as any, I reckon, for the present, anyway — I regret to have to tell you that I am

not the General of the Union Army, but I am in command of a very small part of it tonight and you may tell me your troubles freely. In fact, you must tell me why you were sneaking through the Union lines at this time of night."

"Bress de Lawd, you is a Linkum soger, then," exclaimed the boy, with an unmistakable note of relief in his voice. "I thort I must hab come that fur. I's come a right smart ways, please, sah, Marse Ginerol, I has dat. I's most wored mah shoes off, but that ain't nothin' if I's foun' you at last."

"Then tell me how far you have come, and where you started from," said Sammy.

"Yes, sah, Marse Ginerol," said the lad, submissively, his teeth chattering with the cold. "I's done run away from Ginerol McIntosh's army."

Sammy started, then he laid his hand eagerly on the negro's shoulder. "Come with me to the fire, John. I want to talk to you some more and you are pretty cold, are n't you?" He grasped the young fellow firmly by the arm and led him back to the shelter of the little shop, the lad stumbling over the dark, rough way as if unwilling to go, but he was only spent with faintness and fatigue as Sammy realized with a shock of pity when the firelight on the forge revealed the gray wanness of the thin, dark face.

"Are you hungry, John?" he asked, quickly.

The boy had dropped to the floor as if dead, and lay crouching before the fire, while the snow which he had brought in on his garments rapidly melted into dirty little pools of water beside him.

"Yes, sah, please, sah, Marse Ginerall, I is," he said, a light leaping into the soft, brown eyes.

"Well, John," said Sammy, with a humorous sigh as he surveyed a bit of the rindy heel of a side of bacon and a handful of parched corn which he had fished up from somewhere, "it is n't much, but such as it is, you are welcome to — my breakfast. Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die — and in God's truth, that's no lie, either. Here's a sup of coffee left in the pot. I had it on the fire to keep me from sleeping too soundly. Drink it boy, and don't quibble about it. I want you to get on with your story."

"'Deed and 'deedy, sah, Marse Ginerall," stammered the boy, sobbingly, "I cain't take you-all's breakfast — 'deed I cain't. I's done waited a long time already and I kin wait a while longer — 'deed I kin. I's used to it — 'deed I is."

"Eat, I say!" commanded Sammy, shortly, to cover some natural emotion at sight of the boy's starved condition. "I can wait, too, I

reckon, and the rest of the men won't see me starve. They 'll divvy up when the time comes. Now, eat!"

Thus adjured, the negro ate greedily of the bacon and the corn and drank the coffee — Sammy's proposed breakfast — and if the young officer watched, ruefully, the last burnt kernel slip down the ravenous throat, at least it was not grudgingly. When the last bit had disappeared, the boy folded his arms across his stomach as if he had been filled to repletion, and then looked up gratefully, adoringly, prepared and eager to tell all he knew if only he might win a smile or a word of satisfaction or commendation from "de Ginerol ob de Linkum sogers."

"I's done runned away from Ginerol McIntosh's army, please, sah, Marse Ginerol. I belonged to Marse Medburton and I done stayed by him twel he died from de fever. He was a cunnel in de army, leastways dat is what dey-all call him, Cunnel Medburton ob de Ginerol's staff — Ginerol McIntosh's own staff — and de Ginerol he sot a heap o' store by mah ol' Marse, too. You see, dey all fit togedder down in Texas against dem ar Mex'cans, and hit seemed like as if dat ar fact made 'em kind o' related like, sames if dey was kin. When Marse Medburton he daid, I done runned away. He ain't need no body servant no mo' and I was a-feared to stay with any

o' de yudders, and I did n't dast to let 'em send me back home case I knowed I'd never git so clost agin to de Linkum sogers. I hearn Marse Medburton talkin' 'bout de proxinimity o' you-all, and I's boun' to git heah sooner or later case why you-all is a-fightin' fer we-all culled folks and I's boun' to he'p you all I kin. I knowed you-all was our frien's case I done hearn Marse Medburton say a heap o' times that you-all was gwine set all de niggers free if you ever got a chance, which would n't be twel he and all like he were daid and in de groun'. He daid now so mebbe 't won't be long now twel we-all is free. Marse Medburton, he were good to me — I'd a stayed with ol' Marse if he had n't died. Marse could n't git along without dis heah nigger, no-how. But I's a-feared o' de yudders and 'sides I's boun' to fin' de Linkum sogers. So heah I is," he concluded, ingenuously.

"When did you leave the army, John?" asked Sammy.

"Day befo' yistiddy way long in de night," responded John, unhesitatingly. "I snuck away without nothin' to eat case why I's a-feared to ask fer any, thinkin' mebbe they'd suspicion I was plannin' on runnin' away, and I did n't dast to steal any case things to eat is powerful sca'ce as you knows on, I reckon, though ol' Marse al-lers did say de Linkum sogers was livin' on de

fat o' de lan' — and dey 'd hab missed de vit-tals and sent after me fer sho'. Marse he allers said I was a powerful good han' at knockin' a meal togedder out o' nothin' and he allers gib me somethin' if he had anything his own se'f. He was allers good to me, Marse was, but now he 's daid, I 's boun' to fin' de Linkum sogers. If you-all will let me stay with you, I 'll tote yo' things fer you on de march and cook yo' meals and take keer on you if you gits de fever — ”

“ And leave me when I 'm ‘ daid,’ eh, John? ” interrupted Sammy, whimsically.

“ Not twel you 's in de groun', please, sah, Marse General. I 'd tote you home to yo' mud-der and den I 'd come back to de army and fight — if they 'd let me,” replied John, earnestly.

“ Well, I hope I won't have to put you to the test very soon,” said Sammy, with a smile, “but remember I am depending upon you to do that very thing — some day. Now, you must have come a long way if you started day before yesterday? ”

“ Yes, sah, please, sah, Marse General, least-ways hit seemed a right smart ob a ways; but I 's a-feared so I done hided ever onct in a while under de bushes, and I done slep' some, too.”

“ About how many miles do you think you might have come? ”

“ I don' know, Marse General — mebbe fifty

—mebbe two, three hundred — how'd I keep count creepin' under de bushes, and through de fences, and 'cross de fiel's?"

"Where was your army encamped?"

"I don' know, Marse Ginerl."

"Look here!" cried Sammy, sharply. "You are n't fooling with me, are you, John? You 'd better not! Why is it that you do n't know anything all of a sudden?"

"Hones' to goodness, Marse Ginerl, I is n't foolin' 't all," cried the boy, earnestly. "I don' know nothin' 'bout where we was or how fur we come — I only know I 's boun' to fin' you-all and he'p along the comin' o' the jubilee all I could. I did n' res' no mo'n I fa'rly had to, and when I thort I was bein' follered, I hided. I was boun' to find you-all befo' Ginerl McIntosh did."

"Now, you 're talking, John! So McIntosh's army is marching this way is it?"

"Yes, sah, Marse Ginerl, soon 's dey-all conjuncted, dey started dis yer way."

"Who 'conjuncted?' " asked Sammy.

"Why, dar was Ginerl McCullough and Ginerl McIntosh with all dem ar Texans, and den dar was Ginerl Pike with all dem wild Injuns from somewhar what dey-all called de Injun Nation, and dar was Ginerl Price what dey-all sayed done run away from you-all, and den dar was Ginerl Van Dorn — he done comed from

Richmon' or some place way on de yudder side o' de Mississippi. He 's de big Ginerál. I hearn 'em talkin' 'bout hit while I was holdin' Marse Medburton's hawse. He would go to see de Ginerál though de Ginerál scolded him mighty hard — sayed he looked like a daid man and had orter be home and in bed, 'at de Souf could n't spar' him yit and ain't he shamed o' hisse'f? Marse were out o' he haid den with de fever, but I jes' could n't keep him in baid — he sho' was possessed. Marse, he done s'lute de Ginerál real gallant and swung he hat cl'ar to de groun' and sayed to de Ginerál, 'Dar 'll be no mo' foolin' ner practice runs ner bullet holes in coat tails when de Texans git dar, Ginerál,' and de Ginerál he larf and he eye lit up and he sayed, 'You is right, Cunnel, dar 'll be no turnin' de back to de enemy when de Texans git dar. We don' know how to do dat. We ain' never l'arned; and I spec's hits right late to teach us ol' wah hawses sich new tricks like dat-all.' Den ol' Marse he rode back to de tent and was as gentle as a lamb — seems like he min' were easy now and he could res'. I put him to baid and in 'bout a hour he were daid. He never knowed nothin' no mo' after dat. He died out o' he haid."

"Price with his Missourians, amounting to nearly our force, right there," Sammy communed with himself, "Albert Pike with his Creeks

and his Cherokees, his Chickasaws, and his Choctaws, from the Indian Nation, fully five thousand of them — confounded outrage to make 'em fight, too, when everybody knows how mortal much they 'd like to keep out of it — they 've had a plenty of fighting among themselves — fine examples we are to set 'em at it again — McCullough and McIntosh with that horde of dare-devil Texans; not a man under thirty thousand, all told, or I am very much mistaken. It begins to look mightily like 'Good-by, old Injy,' for the Eighteenth, all right, and 'Good-by, proud world,' for all of Curtis's little army, I 'm afraid. Now, to get this information to General Davis. The fellow may be lying, but I think not; anyway, I 'll let Davis decide that for himself. If the boy slept and hid a good part of the time, and no telling how close they were in the first place, the pesky rebs may be right upon us any minute now." The thought made his face grow stern and keen again in a moment. "John," he asked, crisply, "did you hear anything else about their plans?"

"No, sah, Marse Ginerol, dat 's all I hearn. I thort mebbe if I could fin' de Ginerol ob de Linkum sogers, he 'd like to know 'bout all dem Ginerals being done conjuncted."

"I think he would like to know about it, John," said Sammy, rising to arouse a sleeping sergeant,

"and I am going to give you the opportunity to tell him about it yourself. Sergeant Jameson will show you the way. Be a good boy, John, and here, take this blanket or you 'll never get there. Good-by, I 'll see you after the battle."

Shortly after the departure of John with the sergeant for headquarters, a staff officer rapidly approached the picket line, gave the countersign, rode up to the shop, and informed the officer that General Curtis with his staff would soon pass and that the troops were falling back. In the course of an hour, General Curtis with his staff and body guard passed through the line and halted for a few moments at guard headquarters. The snow was still falling and the General was well wrapped from the cold and the wet in a great-coat with a fur cap pulled over his ears. He inquired the distance to General Davis's position, remarked upon the disagreeable weather, and rode on, leaving Sammy in a flutter of admiration for the man who had chased Price out of Missouri and who was not quailing now, in spite of the appalling gathering together of the foe. Not long after, the head of Carr's Division appeared, and soldiers continued to pass during the remainder of the night and well into the morning. There was a great deal of conjecture among the men as to the meaning of this retrograde movement, but the consensus of opin-

ion seemed to be that General Price had been reinforced and was advancing to attack.

With the morning, Sammy expected to be relieved; but hour after hour dragged by and no relief came. Such a state of affairs was unprecedented. He did not know what to think of it and it worried him considerably. No sounds of battle distant or near disturbed the calm brightness of the day, so welcomely clear and sweet after the storm and murk of the night. The snow melted rapidly and soon there was little left, but the roads were sloppy and bad. Rations were next to nothing, but no relief came.

About noon of the following day, with rations absolutely exhausted, the little picket command heard artillery firing several miles off in the direction of Bentonville which was about nine miles distant.

"Land o' Love, d'ye hear the shootin', Sammy?" asked Zack, who was on the reserve just then and had approached Sammy who was sitting in front of the little shop trying to fathom the meaning of the strange neglect to have him relieved from duty. "It 'pears ter me the batttle's begun, an' I 'low we'd better be a-gittin' back ter camp purty mejum quick."

"I think the rebels must have caught up with Sigel," Sammy replied. "He was at Bentonville when General Curtis ordered us all to come

together and I do n't think he has come up as yet. He's generally behind time. He's pretty middling liable to be cut off, too, if he does n't watch out."

"An' that's prezactly what's a-goin' ter happen ter us if we stay here any longer like idjits. Let's git out o' it, Sammy; what d'ye say?"

"You are talking foolishness, Zack. You know we can't get out of here without orders."

"They do n't recollect 'bout our bein' here. General Davis's got a powerful lot on his mind an' it ain't ter be wondered at if he did fergit us, but it ain't in the rules — or if it is, it had n't orter be — for a handful o' men ter agree ter be forgot, an' hang around, like a bunch o' fool sheep, or that-air fooler burnin' deck feller, away out here three miles from camp with Johnnie Rebs all around us an' us a-knowin' all the time that we're bound ter be slashed to slathereens any minute. No Sirree. I 'low General Davis would thank you hearty for a remindin' him of his overlooktion. I tell you they 've jist fergot us."

"That may be; but if they have, that is our misfortune."

"Well, you're an orficer an' I'm nothin' but a low-down, ornery private that hain't got no business ter go shootin' off his mouth this-a-way, but seein's how a Johnnie Reb is more'n likely most any time ter do it anyhow, I 'low I mought

as well do it for once my ownse'f — do n't git many chancts an' that's a fact — an' I do say that it 'pears ter me you're a-actin' right smart foolish," and with this parting shaft, the stalwart backwoodsman turned away with a resigned but exceedingly mournful shake of the head.

The firing continued to draw nearer and it was evident a fierce battle was raging not very far away. At last, off to the right, the smoke of the fight could be seen drifting up above the tree tops. Sammy slipped out on the line at the point nearest the Bentonville road where the noise of the conflict grew steadily into a deafening roar. Suddenly, crashing through the scrubby black-jacks, came a squadron of the First Missouri Cavalry, driven into the picket line, and, with a sinking heart, Sammy prepared to surrender his sword, never doubting for the moment that rebel cavalry had thus come upon him at last. He was vastly relieved to discover his mistake, and when the Major in command met him with the terse inquiry as to what he did there, he explained the situation simply.

"Well, fall back at once," the Major commanded. "There's nothing to be gained by remaining out here to certain capture. You've been forgotten — that's all, and we have need of all the men we've got — even fools like you."

But Sammy only shook his head stubbornly.

He could not bring himself to desert his post until relieved by the proper authority.

"Well," responded the Major, shortly, "if you can't take orders from me, at least I can take them for myself. I am going back — and you would do well to do likewise."

He tossed Sammy a belt which he explained he had taken from a rebel during the battle, called to him once more to come on, and rode away. When the squadron had disappeared in the direction of General Davis's camp, Sammy returned to headquarters at the little shop in the clearing. The sun was already low in the West and the bare forests looming up all around, a dark and forbidding barrier, seemed all the lonelier, all the more cruel and sinister, by that dreary sense of being forgotten and left behind, enhanced by the riding away of that squadron of their own cavalry, and by the momentary expectation of the coming of the rebels. Suddenly, to his surprise, all sounds of battle died away, and the ensuing quiet was so unexpected that it was more nerve-racking than the furor of sound had been.

With the coming of night, the men urged withdrawing. Sammy absolutely refused to return to camp, but compromised by withdrawing the line to the north side of the field and placing the picket line in the timber. At ten o'clock, there

being still no relief, he decided to send a messenger back to regimental headquarters and have Colonel Washburn ascertain why they were not relieved. The Colonel immediately went to Division headquarters, inquired into the matter, and was told by General Davis that in the excitement of the day and the re-adjustments of the line, this picket had been overlooked. The General promised that he would at once send out a cavalry relief; and along towards midnight, the hungry hearts of Sammy's forgotten command were rejoiced to hear the clanking of sabres as the horsemen approached, and soon the tardily relieved were marching wearily back to report to their regiment.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FIRST DAY

SAMMY and Zack, followed closely by the negro, John, who had insisted upon returning with the sergeant after repeating his story to General Davis, and by the rest of the command, hastened armyward, hoping to locate their regiment in ample time to insure their aching bones a good long rest and sleep before the activities which the morning was sure to bring forth. They were so dead tired that the almost overwhelming desire to lie down and sleep in their tracks had to be fought with unceasing vigilance, and the numbing drowsiness overcome by sheer force of will. The midnight hour was so intensely dark that all landmarks were obliterated, as if a curtain had been lowered between, and were as if they had never been. When sent out upon the picket duty which resulted in their being forgotten, they had left the army encamped just across the creek. Recrossing it after a three-days' absence, not thinking of the changes which the stress of preparing for a great defensive battle must necessarily bring about, they were

startled to find no trace of man or beast in all the quiet forest world bordering that rapid little mountain stream called Sugar Creek. Moreover, as they pressed on, stumbling over the uneven ground, they were surprised to discover that they could see the stars shining overhead away up in the dark southern sky — hitherto blotted out by the heavy arched and interlaced branches of the forest so that many had thought the night was cloudy. Were they lost that the woods appeared so much thinner than when they had last traveled that way? But before they had gone far, they began to realize that they were traversing a veritable labyrinth of fallen trees, over which they stumbled or climbed as the case might be, and understood that these giants of the primeval forest had been felled by their own men to impede the progress of the enemy. So great and wearisome an obstacle in their way were the prostrate and piled up trees that, worried and exhausted as they were, they could not help taking pleasure in the knowledge that the blockade would be so effectual in delaying the approach of the armies of Van Dorn. The blocked roads explained the absence of the Union troops. Undoubtedly, they had fallen back to the top of the hill to await the attack from that more advantageous position.

When at last Sammy's little command reached

the top of the hill and climbed wearily over the fortifications, they found Curtis's men bivouacked on the crest overlooking the valley. They were in line of battle except that they lay upon the ground asleep. The dark that was so thick in the valley was thinner up there on the hill top and in the faint suggestion of light the slumbering, blanket-wrapped forms presented a weird and spectral appearance, which was not the least influence, by any means, that set the hearts of the little bunch of stragglers a-quake at the certainty of what tomorrow's morning would bring forth. They had hungered for it. It was here. In this dark and ghostly hour before the dawn, it assumed its rightful proportions, undimmed by the strong light of day, of comradeship, of the vague, happy "Sometime." It was here, and it was a more awful thing than they had thought.

The tents were all struck, loaded into the wagons, and corralled behind the new line, and locating their regiment under the changed conditions proved to be no easy task. It was only by dint of diligent search and minute inquiry, more than once arousing a slumbering soldier in the hope of gaining information and thereby running much risk of becoming the recipients of sleepy profanity rather than direction from the indignant one so outrageously disturbed, that the

forgotten picket finally stumbled on the Eighteenth and faded apart in the darkness. If any had thought, at sight of the weird, muffled forms on the hill top, to lie awake the rest of the night in shivering anticipation of the morrow, that one was agreeably disappointed. Each and every one dropped to his sleep like the dead, nor moved until aroused in the gray of the early morning; and the night before Pea Ridge was gone.

The army was astir very early. Although the expected night attack had not materialized, doubtless owing to the blocked roads upon the perfecting of which temporary blockade General Dodge had so effectively busied himself for the last day or so, all realized that the coming struggle could be deferred no longer. The eyes and the thoughts of all were bent steadfastly toward the south, where at any moment the rebel hosts were expected to appear. The morning was quiet and sunny and for a long time there was neither sight nor sound of the enemy. It was not until nearly nine o'clock that the prolonged booming of artillery disturbed the calm of the early day, and then men looked at each other in consternation; for the sound came from the rear. This is what had happened: During the night, the entire Confederate army had secretly taken a road between Bentonville and the Union quarters which intersected the telegraph road in the vicin-

ity of Elk Horn Tavern, a small country hostelry on the highway, and thus gained General Curtis's flank and rear without his being any the wiser. He still looked to the southward confidently anticipating an attack from that direction. With the coming of day, scouts were sent out and General Curtis was startled to learn that the rebels were gathered in force around Elk Horn Tavern, and between him and Springfield, upon which had rested the only hope of the Union army in the event of defeat and retreat. Now Springfield was cut off — with the masses of Van Dorn and Price directly across the telegraph road. It was not for nothing that Brigadier-General Samuel R. Curtis, veteran of the Mexican War, had been given command of the Army of the Southwest in preference to other aspirants who took his appointment over them much to heart. He wasted no time in idle speculation or in awaiting developments, but faced his troops squarely about and moved toward the north. General Carr of the Fourth Division, now the right wing of the army, whose pickets Price had run afoul of very early in the morning and thus precipitated the skirmishing around Elk Horn Tavern, advanced upon the army at the extreme right and was soon hotly engaged, while General Osterhaus of the First Division was preparing to advance a force of cavalry, artillery, and infantry to bring on the

battle in front where both armies expected the main fighting would be. Meanwhile, the Third Division, of which the Eighteenth was to play so dramatic and heroic a part in the great battle before the day was over, remained in its original position on Sugar Creek, chafing under the forced inaction, compelled to listen to the tremendous and swelling fire two miles off to their right, which stirred their blood and called to them with such peculiar appeal that the restraint was almost more than they could bear; and yet they must remain out of it, apart from it. Verily, it was hard, for with the booming of the cannon had come the battle madness — and, moreover, it was the first real fight for many of them and they knew not what it was. Why? Why? Why? Their eager and passionate desire demanded ceaselessly. Why were they not rushed to the conflict? Surely, there was need of them. All together, they were too few for the reported hordes of Van Dorn. Why must they wait, idle and in smug safety, while their comrades bore the brunt of the terrible attack and would bear away the honors as well?

General Curtis had wisely retained the Division in order to be prepared to repulse any approach from the south, providing the attack at Elk Horn Tavern proved merely a feint and the enemy's main attack still come from that

direction, as he more than half expected. About eleven o'clock, however, he became convinced that the attack at the Tavern was serious, and to the immense relief of the boys of the Third Division, Davis was ordered out, leaving only one regiment, the Eighth Indiana, to hold the position; and right dolefully did those left behind watch their comrades leave for the fray. But another surprise awaited the Division. Within only a half mile of the fighting line at the Tavern, a staff officer came galloping up in the utmost haste with orders for General Davis to counter-march and go to Lee Town, on the new left of the army. Mystified, the men proceeded to counter-march for a half mile or so and then took a road leading west and soon came to the little hamlet of Lee Town. At the edge of the village, they were ordered to throw off their knapsacks and move forward. Heavy firing could be heard immediately in front, the near and sharp rattle and roar of the artillery startlingly distinct from that more muffled booming away over to the right, and yet mingling with it, someway, until that distant boom, boom, boom, came to seem like a prolonged echo of the nearer guns.

After passing through the town, they met some cavalry under General Osterhaus who had gone forth in the morning, bearing prisoners with them, and the wounded. Two or three hundred

yards more brought them to the Peoria Battery posted just to the left of the road on the edge of a field, and here they halted for a short time.

Zack and Percy Selvin had been marching side by side, and at the first glimpse of the carnage real war had wrought, dead men lying stretched upon the ground, their ghastly faces turned unblinkingly to the bright sky, or crumpled up in a heap, or sprawled over a stump as they had fallen, Percy's face paled and he began to tremble violently.

"Never you mind, young 'un," Zack comforted, pityingly. "It ain't our turn yit by a long shot, an' do n't you ever fergit that a whole passel o' sogers always comes out o' battle without ary a scratch — an' jist a handful gits kilt. Pears-like the fightin' 's over, here, anyhow. Jist my ornery luck ter miss all the fun!"

Color was slowly coming back into the boy's stricken face as Zack continued his good-natured rallying of his oozing courage; but a new and sudden look of wide-eyed terror on his countenance caused Zack to glance quickly in the direction upon which the boy's eyes seemed frozen with horror. In a bush immediately in front of them, the half of a man's head was hanging. Zack promptly placed his gigantic frame between the awful sight and the shaking Percy.

"Now, look here, young 'un," he rallied,

lightly, "you hain't got ary call ter be payin' attention ter that air sort o' thing at all. You'd better be dead ter onct than ter be scared ter death ever time you see a dead man. You'd orter be 'shamed o' youself. Whatever would that air leetle gal back in Missouri that you've been a-tellin' me so much about think if she could see you turnin' pale before ever you was hit? I thought you said she said she'd be thinkin' 'bout you, an' had faith in you?"

"She did, Zack, honest. I do n't deserve it, but she did say that very thing."

"An' would be thinkin' 'bout you, did you say?"

"Yes, Zack, she said that, too."

"Well, can't you fairly see her a-doin' of it, with her eyes shinin' an' her purty smile clappin' you on? I kin see her my ownse'f. I tell you if I had a gal like that a-lookin' on, I would n't be a-feared o'—the devil himself—"

"Nor 'hants'?" suggested Percy, with a faint smile, knowing Zack's weakness.

"No, ner hants," pursued Zack, rashly and vaingloriously, it being high noontide; but he patted Percy approvingly on the shoulder, thereby acknowledging the justice of the sly thrust. "I 'low you ain't so bad off after all, if you kin joke yit. That air leetle gal o' your'n, now, she's most the purtiest thing I ever see—"

always exceptin' Susie, o' course," wondering ruefully the while he cheered if he were being altogether loyal to Sammy, who, most likely, was also thinking about that same little girl back in Missouri.

"How do you manage it, Zack?" asked Percy, wistfully. "I don't want to be afraid. I am ashamed all the time. I have never yet seen you scared. Tell me your secret."

"There's a passel braver 'n me," replied Zack, soberly. "Ask them. Pattern yourself after our First Lieutenant, for instance. Why, he ain't even a-feared o' hants, Percy!"

"But it's you, Zack, you, that I am looking to to help me through this awful time coming. What keeps you going straight ahead?"

"Why, I 'low it's jist Susie a-lookin' on," said Zack, simply.

The troops moved to the right and trotted down a woods road, which they had no sooner entered than the bullets began to whistle all around them like mad. For the life of him, poor Percy could not keep from wincing and dodging, and presently, he was lagging behind. A sharp prod in the back caused him to glance quickly over his shoulder, and there was Zack, his face no longer pityingly sympathetic, but stern, set, determined, prodding him forward with the point of the bayonet.

“No more fallin’ out for you, my lad,” he drawled, convincingly. “The Lieutenant said you was to have your chanct — not a skinny one, either — so I ’m jist a-seein’ that you git it, that’s all. Do n’t lag behind that-a-way! It’s double-quick! Keep up, young ’un, keep up! This here ol’ bay’net has a powerful sharp pint. Keep up, I tell you!”

Sammy was trotting along by the side of the Captain. The bullets came whizzing along fast and furious, and often and often one could feel the breath of their rapid flight through the air upon one’s cheek, and could hear them still going on, singing their sibilant song, until the sound of it was lost in the myriad other sounds of the battle. When one hissed past the Captain, uncomfortably close to his head, he dodged, and Sammy laughed. He could n’t help it. It was unpardonable, but the laugh was out before he could stop it.

“What are you laughing at, ninny?” cried the Captain, sharply.

“I was laughing at your trying to dodge a bullet,” said Sammy, honestly, but apologetically.

“This is a pretty time to be laughing, I must say!” retorted the Captain, wrathfully. At another time, he, too, might have laughed with Sammy; but not today, with cannon thundering

on every side, showers of grape and canister hurtling overhead, minie balls hissing past, with the acrid smoke of it all choking one and alternately hiding and revealing the awful sights of a battle field already fought over. Only the frivolous could find anything amusing under such serious circumstances — feather-brained, under-graduate youngsters who had played at drill on a university campus, like Sammy Goodman, for instance. The Captain had forgotten for the moment that it was on the University campus that he had marked and mentally chosen his First Lieutenant.

After advancing about a quarter of a mile through this rain of lead, they came to a little field where they halted, although here the bullets were pattering down thicker and faster than ever. The men sought desperately to find protection behind trees at the edge of the woods, and here the Captain of Company E showed his mettle by standing boldly out in front keeping his men in order, where it was a thousand wonders he was not shot. He was a brave man, the Company's Captain, there could be no question then or after as to that, but — the bravest sometimes dodge bullets. When one would come rather close on one side of his head, he would take his hand and brush along the side of his face as if shooing flies, and, the next moment, he

would be doing the same thing on the other side.

And then, suddenly, the field swarmed with men in blue falling back. The Second Brigade had been hotly engaged, and, sorely pressed by superior numbers, having practically faced McCullough's entire command massed to the west and north of Lee Town, was rushing back in more or less disorder. The Eighteenth and the Twenty-second Indiana regiments were ordered to form in the road running beside the field and stop the rout. Colonel Pease, Chief of General Davis' Staff, undertook to reform the disorganized line behind these two regiments, and, being unable to find a commissioned officer among them, yelled, "Where are your officers? Are n't there any officers belonging to this gang?" Finally catching sight of a corporal, he cried: "Corporal, you form these men!"

After some order had been obtained, the two plucky regiments which had stood like a rock of refuge, in the kindly lee of which the broken and disorganized waifs and strays of those who had been literally over-ridden by the swarming of the myriads of the redoubtable McCullough had caught their breath and made ready to begin again, made a left half-wheel through the field and went into the woods. To their utter consternation, they had no sooner entered the timber than the battery they had so lately left began

shelling them. It was only a quarter of a mile behind them with scattered timber and open field between, and panic was imminent, for there is nothing so absolutely demoralizing to soldiers as to be fired upon by their own men. The enemy — that is what he is there for, they expect it, are braced for it, are upheld by the stimulation of being able to fire back, by the happy chance of returning, with usury, what they had received; but to have their own men suddenly open fire upon them — it was like having the bottom drop out of the universe, leaving them empty of resource, of reason, and of courage. It was with the utmost difficulty that a general rout was prevented. All were ordered to lie down, and Colonel Pattison of the Eighteenth, commanding the Brigade, directed a staff officer standing near to order that battery to cease firing, it was firing upon their own troops. The officer gave one quiet, comprehending glance into the flashing eyes of the commander, and then, without a word, turned and headed his horse straight toward the open field with its awful blur of smoke, straight toward the thunder of the cannon, straight toward the rain of shot and shell.

Sammy drew his breath hard and his eyes shone. In the exaltation of spirit which had been his since the moment that the Division had been ordered out, he wished that it had been he

who had been sent upon that journey from which the odds were so heavy against one's ever returning. Would they know him — their own men so devotedly but so mistakenly directing that deadly fire — would they recognize the gallant messenger in time to avert his death by their own hands? Gracious God in heaven! Sammy, stretched at length behind a fallen sapling, saw the young staff officer with steady hand and eyes come galloping down the line toward his company, close to which he must pass upon entering the exposed field, saw him sitting straight and strong and true in his saddle, one moment, and the next saw him reel slightly and fall to the ground shot through the heart.

Many had heard Colonel Pattison's terse order and realized the importance of it; and one man, not quick ordinarily to see a fine point, who had never seen the time when he would not have welcomed "pneumony fever" as an indisputable excuse for staying away from school, who had lived to be nearly nineteen years old before seeing a railroad train, who would have died rather than look upon a "hant," grasped this thought that Colonel Pattison's message must be carried across that field, why not by him as well as by another, so quickly that the dead man's foot was scarcely dragged from the stirrup before his own was there in its place.

"Why, Zack!" murmured Sammy, a lump coming into his throat and a smart to his eyes. "Why, Zack! Maybe you'll be killed, old chap! Why, Zack!"

These spectacular deeds of heroism are fine, soul-stirring things when performed by people you do not know — distant staff officers, for instance — but when it comes to "home folks," boys you have played hookey and three old cat with, gone swimming with, spelled down with, and taken up arms against the "Cracker Neck fellers" with, oh, it is still glorious, of course, but "Why, Zack!" is the cry of the heart.

With one flying leap, Zack was in the saddle, and, whooping and yelling, beating the horse, which was nothing more than a small sheep pony, with his cap, his long legs nearly reaching the ground, he flew across the field and dashed recklessly right up to the front of the battery.

"What in hell air you a-firin' on our own men for?" he yelled, waving his cap in the air as a signal to cease mistaken hostilities.

"A Yank! A Yank!" the men around the battery suddenly began to shout, and to his infinite dismay, Zack perceived that the rebels had taken possession of the guns, and thus the indiscriminate firing was explained.

"Good Lord!" he muttered, under his breath, and, turning the little sheep pony, he came back

lickety click across that field in the shortest time, it is safe to assert, that that sagacious animal had ever made a similar distance in all his sheep-herding life. Zack was no coward, as has been shown — except when ghosts were floating around — but during that short mad dash for the woods and the Eighteenth, he bade loving farewells to “Pore ol’ Pap an’ Mam an’ the leetle tads an’ the folks ter hum an’ — an’ Susie. Do n’t fergit me, Susie, an’ you kin marry some good stiddy man if you like — I do n’t want you for ter be lonely all your life — a slip o’ a gal like you needs ter be loved an’ took keer on — only do n’t plumb fergit me, dearie, will you? Sammy ’ll tell you how it come I could n’t come back ter you myself.”

Why he was not killed was one of the miracles of the war, as he was in the midst of a heavy cross fire from the rebel front and from the captured battery. By this time, Colonel Pattison was in a towering rage. He met Zack at the edge of the timber.

“Did n’t you order them to cease firing? Do n’t you see that they are still shelling us? What do you think you went up there for — to pass the time of day?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Zack, respectfully, too dazed at finding himself safe and whole at once to enlighten the Colonel’s mind as to his mistake,

"I ordered them ter quit firin' on us all right, but I 'low they did n't see fit ter mind."

"What do you mean, sir?" raged the Colonel.

"The rebels have that battery, sir," said Zack, with dazed simplicity.

The Colonel's surprise was not to be wondered at, considering the fact that he had but just left the battery in Union hands, surrounded by Union troops, with the Eighteenth and the Twenty-second between it and the immediate rebel front; but a considerable Confederate force had slipped in behind and taken the guns without his being any the wiser. However, if his surprise was great, his quick recovery from it was greater. The advantage to the Confederates in the possession of the Union guns in that position was tremendous. The alert, military mind of Colonel Pattison grasped its significance instantly and he met the situation and conquered it with a brilliance and sweeping success that should have won him peculiar distinction at the War Department, as it did in the hearts of the Eighteenth Indiana.

Immediately after Zack's return, the rebels who had taken the battery began to move up, making the welkin ring with that strange, piercing, insistent battle cry which had already come to be known as the rebel yell. When within sixty rods of the Union men waiting in the edge of the timber, they were met with a volley of musketry

that was awful in its effect. These Indiana regiments carried the old muskets only, loaded with three buck shot and an ounce ball. They would not shoot far, sixty yards was about their limit, but they were terrible in the proper range, and the slaughter they wrought among that rebel advance was perhaps unique in history for the number of men lost in so short a time. The one volley was followed by the order to charge at once without reloading.

The Union line was formed north and south, parallel with the east side of the field, to the south of which was the battery. With a rush and a wild enthusiasm, the charge swept across the field. When about half the distance had been covered, a huge, fallen tree suddenly presented itself directly in the way of Company E of the Eighteenth, practically covering its entire front and the right of Company K. If a kingdom was lost for the want of a horse-shoe nail, true it is that the battle around Lee Town, and if Lee Town mayhap Elk Horn Tavern and thus Pea Ridge — for what an infinite chain of difference in results one break would set going — came so perilously near being lost by the unplanned presence of a worthless, worn-out tree that the analogy holds good. The tree was heavily branched and really made a formidable obstruction, especially considering the fact that the men were

under severe fire all the time. And now was the time come for the Eighteenth, all untried as was Sammy, to show the stuff it was made of. It may be that because always in the backwoods country he had been looked up to and made a leader, willy nilly, helped Sammy then; perhaps the sense of responsibility because of his better understanding, which had quickened his footsteps on a certain first day of school when the bright world of after-frost had steeped him in the wine of waiting and forgetfulness, helped him more. Certain it is that, when the company wavered, it seemed to Sammy Goodman that the one thing in all the world worth while was to keep the line from breaking. It must not break. Simply, *it must not break*. Oddly enough, he was not in the least frightened. He did not seem to have time to think about being afraid. There was room for nothing else in his mind but the straightening and strengthening of that fighting line. Bullets pattered all around him but he paid no more attention to them than if they had been so many snowflakes. He was at the left of the company, encouraging, rallying, commanding, his face flushed, his eyes shining. The killing of Colonel Hendricks of the Twenty-second caused much confusion and disorganization in the ranks of that regiment, which was communicated more or less to the left wing of

the Eighteenth. Suddenly, the whole company, especially to the right, became confused and manifested a startling disposition to run, to follow the demoralized Twenty-second whose gallant Colonel lay dead upon the field.

Sammy glanced hurriedly around, seeking the Captain. He could see him nowhere. He himself seemed to be the ranking officer. Rushing to the right, he met a sergeant on a frantic run to the rear. The face of the "non-com" was absolutely colorless and his eyes had a dazed, fixed stare as of one in a trance. They were glassy and frozen. He was brushing past Sammy without in the least recognizing him when Sammy seized his arm and shook him soundly, crying sharply:

"Where are you going? What is the matter with you?"

"We are whipped! We are whipped!" the sergeant cried, in a high, strained voice. "Run! Run! We are whipped!"

"Whipped nothing!" snapped Sammy. "You are dreaming! Wake up, man! Go back to your company! Do you hear me? Go back to your company!"

He turned the dazed man around and headed him for the front. The sergeant stared at him blankly a moment and then the light of reason slowly dawned in his eyes, called back to life by the irresistible magnetism of the young com-

mander's personality. It was as if he had in very truth been in the grip of some hideous nightmare. He drew a long breath, and went back to the company without another word.

Sammy then rallied that part of the line which had been so perilously near to breaking. Some of the men scrambled over the troublesome obstruction; others went around it. It seemed a thing alive, so insolently and vindictively had it thrust itself across their way. Hastening back to the left which he had but just brought to good order, he was momentarily dismayed to find it all broken up, mixing in the utmost confusion with Company K and others of the left wing. If, after all, Company E should be put to rout! It must not be! It must not be! If his company bolted, it would take the entire left wing with it, leaving but five companies of the Eighteenth, the only organized force in that part of the field. It would be impossible for so small a force to drive back the swarming rebels and recapture the battery. In all probability, these companies would break, too. If Sammy's mind and heart a moment before had been singularly free of all else but the simple conviction that the line must be held steady, in some way, it mattered not how just so it was held, now more than ever were they so when he saw it tottering to dismay and defeat. Captain Lowe of Company K was mak-

ing heroic but unsupported efforts to bring order out of chaos. Sammy plunged into the breach, and so irresistibly commanding was he in his magnificent young manhood, so contagious was his enthusiasm, and so unquestioned his courage which ever cried, "Come!" and never, "Go!" that the left rallied to a man, and, with a rousing cheer, straightened the straggling line and sprang forward.

Returning once more to the right, Sammy looked anxiously for the Captain, dreading to find him slain. Glancing along the now unwavering line, he was surprised to behold the Captain in front of Company C, the second company to the right, waving his sword and cheering on the men. Sammy ran to him and said in a low voice, "Captain, Company E is down this way."

The Captain looked at him oddly a moment, somewhat in the same manner that the sergeant had a short time before; then he turned and quietly followed his First Lieutenant. Confused he was; never a coward. Super-excitement plays us strange tricks sometimes. A high sense of duty and a strong will kept him with his face to the enemy. That he was for the moment unable to differentiate between the companies was a mere matter of detail, lost in the throbbing of the mighty, main idea. Sammy never mentioned it, nor did he. The incident was closed.

The charge, now composed of the unbroken Eighteenth with one company of the Twenty-second under plucky Captain Keith joined to its left, pushed on to complete victory. The rebels retreated before the compact rush and the battery was retaken.

Five minutes later, General Davis himself rode up. Where he came from, Sammy never knew, nor how he escaped death or capture. His presence there was another of those unexplainable miracles of the war, which touched up the awful woe of it and made it bearable. Eyes burned and throats grew lumpy as the tired, over-excited, disheveled, powder-besmirched boys of the Eighteenth with the reaction from the exhilaration of their devoted charge already setting in looked up and beheld their gallant and beloved General descended upon them as from the clouds. His was a figure well worth their impassioned gazing upon, straight, alert, handsome, military, radiant, exalted, fearless. They admired him for his strict disciplinarianism, and forgot his hasty temper in admiration of his fairness and courage.

"Men of the Eighteenth Indiana," he cried, in a clear, ringing voice that all distinctly heard and hugged to their tired hearts and kept warm there forever, "Men of the Eighteenth Indiana, ten minutes ago, I thought the battle was lost — but you have saved it!"

CHAPTER XV

A GREAT VICTORY

IF THE Eighteenth had known then what was learned later, that both General McCullough and General McIntosh had been killed during the afternoon's battle, picked off by Federal sharp-shooters, its rest would have been calmer that night; for, in the minds of many, McCullough was more to be feared than all the rest of the Confederate leaders engaged in that campaign put together. General McIntosh, too, had justified the proud boast of Colonel Medburton that there would be no holes in coat-tails when the Texans got there, by being shot squarely through the heart. But the Eighteenth did not know these things, and, as night closed in, the boys were tired, very hungry and troubled, notwithstanding their recent splendid charge and glorious victory. They stayed by the battery until nearly eleven o'clock. The men had had nothing to eat since the leisurely early breakfast when they had so unsuspectingly waited for Van Dorn to come marching up from the south. They were chilled through and through and were, for the most part,

without blankets, having thrown them away at Lee Town. They had no other thought than that their lot was to bivouac there at the battery for the night, and the prospect was a gloomy one.

About nine o'clock, some time after all fighting had ceased, Sammy, leaning against a bullet-ridden tree in the chilly dark, sick with hunger, giddy for want of sleep, realizing how desperate was their situation unless the fighting was soon over, with no forage for man or beast, oddly and half-deliriously dreaming of five biscuits Mrs. Posey had made for Zack one morning long ago, elaborately explaining as she did so that "Pore Zack always eats more when he's sick," felt a light touch on his arm and heard a soft whisper:

"Is dat you, Marse General?"

"Why, John, where did you come from, and how on earth did you get here?" cried Sammy, in startled surprise.

"De Lawd knows — I don'. I only knows I's boun' to git heah an' heah I is," said John, simply. "I's done brung you some coffee, Marse General. Heah 't is, in dis yer ol' canteen. Now, don' you spill hit! Dar ain' no mo' whar dis yer come from — an' yo' han' so shaky I's a-feared. An' heah am some bread. Hab some o' de fat o' de lan' ol' Marse was a-tellin' me about."

"John," said Sammy, his voice as shaky as his

hand, "what a silly notion that is that in Heaven the angels will all be white regardless of color on earth. It would n't be Heaven without your black skin, boy. If I found you had turned a pasty white, I 'd have to come away."

Never did anything ever before taste so good as tasted that scanty meal of bread and coffee. Sammy felt a new man when he had finished.

"I planted better than I knew," he murmured, whimsically but gratefully, "and my bacon rind has returned already. Talk about bread returning after many days, bacon rind has it beaten all hollow in point of time. But, John, where did you get all this richness?"

"De bread I toted undah mah coat sence mawnin' befo' you-all stawted, an' de coffee I borrowed from somebody ovah yondah. Heah 's de blanket what you done gib me de night I foun' you befo', an' whar does you want yo' baid made, Marse Ginerl?"

About eleven o'clock, after most of the weary men had fallen asleep in their fireless bivouac, there came a whisper to get up and fall in line. What did it mean? Were they about to be attacked or were they going to attack? Were they to retreat or simply change their position? They moved out as quietly as they could, marched back through Lee Town, and on until they struck the telegraph road that led to Elk Horn Tavern;

then turned north and marched about half a mile to a field. Here the troops were ordered to file to the right and form a line at the edge of the field with their left resting on the road, and were then allowed to get what rest they could. Then only was their real destination known. For some reason, locked as yet in their great leader's mind, they were come to bolster up Carr's splendid right wing.

Zack and Percy gathered brush and piled it in the lee of a large dead tree. Thus they were protected from the dampness of the ground and partly so from the chilling wind. They were comparatively comfortable and lay down to sleep; but the excitement caused by the mystery surrounding the movement just made had driven away the desire for sleep, unutterably weary as they were, and presently they drifted into low-voiced conversation concerning the events of the day and speculating upon what the morrow would bring forth. That fighting would be renewed with the coming of day, there could be but little doubt after their stealthy change of position in the night. Where the brunt of it would fall was a debatable question which would be answered by the rebel guns in the morning. The position of the main Confederate host was as unknown to Curtis's little army as were the terrors of the unknown seas to Columbus and his handful of

men, and the shivering uncertainty was as hard to bear as was the superstitious dread of that earlier time. A strange hush brooded over the slumbering bivouac, the stranger for the surcease of the awful roar of the day's sounds. The fit only were here — the fighting line. The wounded were all in the rear, their moans smothered in the pitying distance; and the dead were left behind, and they were very still. The fit, yes, only the fit were here now, sleeping quietly and gravely beneath the dark canopy of the far off sky, blanketless, hungry, yet sleeping the short night through that they might be the more fit in the morning. When night should come again, there would be fewer asleep here in front, more back there; the line still fit, but growing very small.

An hour of quiet.

“Are you asleep, Zack?”

“Nope. Not yit. I do n't seem skeered, an' I'm plumb wore out an' rheumaticky, an' yit, somehow, I can't seem ter git ter sleep. I 'low I won't git ary wink this night an' then I'll be the one laggin' behind an' you'll git a chanct ter stick *me* in the back, Percy. I hope you'll do it, too.”

“I can't sleep, either. I have been thinking about home. There are so few of us, Zack, and I'm afraid there won't be very many left to —

to tell the folks back home about it. I have a feeling tonight that I shall never go home again — that I shall be shot — ”

“ In the back? ” interrupted Zack, laughingly, hoping to divert his companion’s somber thoughts into cheerier channels.

“ No, you won’t let me,” responded Percy, ingenuously. “ I know it sounds babyish and all that to talk about dying, but I can’t help the feeling — it’s there — and if anything should happen to me tomorrow, I wish you would write to my mother. This is her address on this bit of paper.”

“ You kin count on me for that,” Zack assured him, earnestly. “ I ’low your mother has a right smart o’ book larnin’ — jedgin’ from her son — but I ’ll git Sammy to spell the big words. I never was much on the spellin’ propersition. Skull’s too durned thick, I reckon. But Sammy ’ll be right glad ter he’p me. What Sammy don’t know ’bout spellin’ an’ sich ain’t worth a-puttin’ in the book. I never knowed him ter miss on those belly-achin’ words in the back. Sammy ’ll he’p me, so do n’t worry.”

“ Does he help you write your letters to Susie? ” asked Percy, smiling faintly.

“ Nary a letter,” replied Zack, serenely. “ Why, Susie’s jist my little sweetheart an’ she do n’t care,”

"And mother is just — my little mother, Zack, and she won't care," said Percy, softly. "I'd rather you wrote it every bit yourself, just you. You have been very good to me. I do not forget it — nor will she."

"Then you have forgiven me for bein' so cross with you an' stickin' you in the back ter make you keep up? I did n't mean nothin' agin you, you know that, do n't you, but somehow I jist could n't abide seein' you disgrace yourself that-away."

"Forgiven you? Why, you did me a very great favor, the greatest of all. As I have just said, I do not forget it. Our Lieutenant was good to me, too, Zack, but not in your way. He is so brave that he seems removed from me, some-way, on another plane; while you — you are just as brave and yet, someway, you seem to understand. But he has given me my chance — for the sake of the girl back in Missouri, because she asked it —" his voice was very low indeed then — "and, as you said, not a skinny one, either, and so, if I forget tomorrow, I hope you will shoot me dead."

"All right," said Zack, cheerfully, "but I ain't a-lookin' for you ter be took that-away agin. Before this here war is over, you'll perform some brave act that'll make you famous."

"If I can only have the nerve to stay by your

side, Zack, through all the fighting we take part in, that will be sufficient for me. If I succeed in doing that, I shall be proud of myself — when the war is over.”

“I ’m a-feared you ’ll be a mighty common soger if you do n’t git any fuder than ter foller me,” rejoined Zack, soberly.

“That is all I am trying to be — a common soldier.”

Shortly after sun-up the Confederates opened fire with thirty-six cannon and then such an infernal racket of grape and canister took place as the Eighteenth had never before faced; and then it was that the seer-like wisdom and the incomparable generalship of the leader of that brave little Army of the Southwest began to be apparent. He had not known that Van Dorn had withdrawn all his troops from Lee Town and concentrated them at Elk Horn Tavern to crush the Federal right wing early in the morning while Curtis’s army was so widely separated and before Davis and Sigel could come up — but he had thought it likely. Hence the stealing forth in the night of Davis’s Division.

The First Indiana Battery could not stand the fearful cannonading which had opened up and fell back. Sammy came up to where Zack and Percy were lying flat upon the ground behind a tree.

"This is rather bad, boys," he said, as he flung himself down behind a small sapling, no larger around than a man's wrist. He had hardly ceased speaking before it was cut off and fell over upon him.

"How are you making out, Selvin?" he continued, as calmly as if nothing had happened.

"Pretty well, thank you, Lieutenant," replied Percy, steadily, but shivering slightly as Sammy tossed the broken sapling aside.

"We hain't either o' us been shot in the back yit," spoke up Zack, "but I 'low I may be soon if this gits much hotter."

At that moment, General Sigel came up with his Division and moved to the left where was a field with rising ground, and here the German troops formed with flags flying and with as much precision as if on parade. A splendid body of men they were — fit American citizens — and right gallant did they look in their "Osterhaus" hats, forming under heavy fire from all the rebel batteries as steadily and as perfectly as though guns and fear and death did not exist.

"What a magnificent sight!" exclaimed Sammy, with intense admiration. "How would you like to be over there with those fellows, Zack?"

"They 're shore behavin' right well, Sammy, but I dunno but it takes ever bit as much nerve

ter lie still here expectin' ever minute ter have your head blowed off."

"I reckon you are right, Zack," Sammy replied, as a shell went screaming over his head and exploded a short distance behind.

Through all the fearful havoc wrought by the rebel artillery, the Eighteenth kept its head and its ground; not until the order came to fall back did it budge an inch from its position, but, justified by the command, it was very glad indeed to move back two hundred yards or so to the comparative shelter of the heavier timber, the enemy maintaining a continuous and vicious shelling all the while. It was not for long, however, that the men were permitted to bask in this somewhat meager but gratefully welcomed protection. The Eighteenth Indiana was too fit for that. The order came to move to the right. So the regiment moved eastward for a short distance, faced north, then moved to the east again and thus became the extreme right of the army. Moving rapidly to a clearing, perhaps three or four hundred yards wide, it formed once more in line of battle. To press forward, straight across this field, were the orders, and the Eighteenth trotted into the open with the same airy confidence with which it had rushed forward yesterday to charge the battery, and with almost as much enthusiasm. The obstacle encountered then had been glori-

ously surmounted — or gone around. What met it now, flesh and blood could not endure — and live. The men had traversed nearly two-thirds of the distance across when the rebels suddenly opened up a masked battery and then was hell let loose. Grape and canister were hurled right into their faces with such unexpectedness and such awful continuity as nothing less than superman could have resisted. For the first and last time in its history, the Eighteenth fell back without orders.

Sammy was swept along with the backward rush, as wildly eager for the woods as any. In the midst of the confused scramble for safety, it was suddenly borne in upon him that he must have been shot. His right foot pained him severely at every step so that he was compelled to limp and soon began to lag behind. In the strange delirium that super-excitement begets, he thought that presently he should have to lie down there on the exposed, powder-smoked field, and wait until the battle was over for some one to come for him and carry him away to the horrors of the field hospital — if he still lived. It would likely be night. All at once, his brain cleared and he realized what had happened. With an impatient exclamation, he sat right down in the path of the roaring battery and took off his shoe. Zack was at his side in a moment.

"My God, Sammy!" he cried, huskily, his face showing white through the grime of the battle. "Air ye wounded? Where be ye hurted?"

"No, you idiot! Can't a fellow take a stone out of his shoe without the whole army's stopping to gape at him? Hurry along there if you do n't want to get shot!" cried Sammy, wrathfully, though in justice it must be said that his choler was aroused at the presence of the stone rather than that of Zack.

The stone was a large one, and jagged, and his foot was bruised and swollen from the vicious rasping and jabbing. When he rose to follow his retreating comrades, the shoe was in his hand. It was in this undignified manner that the idol of Company E limped back to the shelter of the timber. The men were all lying down and Sammy quickly sought the protection of a nearby stump. While they lay there at the edge of the woods, waiting, wondering what the next move would be, their hearts were figuratively driven into their throats by a tremendous uproar from behind. They turned to behold a world of troops, it seemed, moving down upon them, with blood-curdling yells and with a display of fresh, sweeping enthusiasm and purpose that was paralyzing to the little bunch of Hoosiers huddled down in the thin timber hugging the roots and the dead grass. Trapped was the first be-

numbing thought. The next was one of intense relief, for the Union flag was floating over the advancing troops, its folds outspread and fluttering in the spring breeze. This feeling of relief in turn was quickly changed to one of chilling dismay; those noisy, gesticulating troops bearing down upon them thought that they were rebels! For the first time since hearing the guns boom out away over at Elk Horn Tavern early the day before, Sammy was scared, deathly so. He had been excited just now in the mad scamper back across the fields to get away from that belching masked battery but he had not been particularly afraid. Now, however, he was in a very panic of fear. He knew that their own flag could not be seen by the approaching men for it was with the right wing at the east end of the field and therefore not visible from their position. Inspired by the regiment's desperate straits, he ran toward the newcomers, already halting for the first volley, and, utterly forgetful of his lacerated foot, jumped upon a big log, waved his shoe frantically in the air and yelled:

"Union! Union! Don't shoot! Union! Union!"

The officers were quick to grasp the situation and immediately ordered their men not to fire; but most of them had their muskets ready, and it was with extreme difficulty that the firing was

prevented on such short notice. It was an anxious moment for the Eighteenth until the guns were lowered, and a serious tragedy averted. If a single volley had been fired, the effect would have been disastrous, as the new troops were within fifty yards of the Indiana men.

These new troops proved to be the Thirty-seventh Illinois coming up as a reinforcement. The Eighteenth now moved out into the field again, under heavy fire, and re-formed with the Illinois regiment on its left. It was hard to form the line in the face of that terrible cannonading from the treacherous battery which had so unexpectedly raised its head and hissed forth its poison like a snake in the grass; but General Davis himself dashed up at full speed, a splendid figure of a man, and aided in steadying the battle front. He seemed to bear a charmed life; for he made a goodly target out in front of the nervous, straggling troops, paying no heed whatsoever to the shells hurtling around him, as sublimely oblivious to them as if they were not; and yet he came out from that maelstrom of shot and shell unscathed. When an exceptionally heavy volley of grape and canister came pouring into the ranks, and the Thirty-seventh began to waver, he shouted:

“Men of the Eighteenth Indiana, give three cheers!”

He was remembering the old regiment's glorious and history-making charge of yesterday. An electrical thrill swept the Eighteenth to a man. It was General Davis, their beloved commander, who had thus appealed to them. Soldiers will always cheer when called upon; but never before did such rousing cheers soar up toward the blue vault of Heaven as then issued from the throats of the loyal old Eighteenth, for their hearts were with their general and they wanted him to know that they were. The thrilling cheers straightened the line like magic and General Davis immediately ordered a charge. When the troops struck the fence bordering the field on the far side, the rebel side, the enemy broke and ran. The Union troops pursued them for a half mile or so, straight up the hill, keeping up a deadly fire all the way. Two companies of the Thirty-seventh Illinois had Colt's revolving rifles and the steady firing was marvelously effective. The way was strewn with the dead and the dying beaten to the ground by that pitiless and steady rain of fire.

Upon reaching the level at the summit of a hill, the pursuit was discontinued, and the troops halted at a road leading to Elk Horn Tavern from the east. In a few moments General Curtis came riding along with his hat off and smiling, and the men cheered lustily. It was soon learned

that Sigel had turned the enemy's right as Davis's Division had turned their left, doubling them up like a jack-knife, and that the hosts of Van Dorn, the "conjoined" armies of Price, McCullough, McIntosh, and Pike, as rudderless as drifting autumn leaves, had fled.

So ended the first real battle in which the Eighteenth Indiana had taken part. The regiment had received its first baptism of fire in the true sense. The men were sobered. They now realized the grim realities of war. Prior to Pea Ridge, they had been eager, impatient to get into battle — henceforth, they went into battle as a duty, clearly understanding its awful tragedies. Boys became men. Discipline was appreciated, and the "pomp and circumstance of glorious war" had lost its glamor; but duty, patriotism, and high resolve took its place. It required the crucible of battle to refine the careless boy into the good soldier.

The concentration of the troops in front of Elk Horn Tavern on the night of the seventh was a movement that marked General Curtis as a man of superior tactical ability. A mistake would have been fatal. When darkness stopped the fighting, the position was practically as follows: On the Confederate side, McCullough and McIntosh had been killed; Pike with his Indians had left the field. At Elk Horn Tavern, the rebel

lines were in good condition and the fighting, in the main, had been in their favor. Van Dorn decided to withdraw all the troops in front of Lee Town and concentrate at Elk Horn, and massed his batteries, about thirty-six guns, expecting to crush Curtis's right wing early in the morning, which would have unquestionably given him the victory. On the Union side, Davis's Division had been fully reorganized; Sigel had come up from the valley on the left, and the troops were ready for what might happen in the morning. On the right, Carr and Asboth had been roughly handled and part of their line driven back some little distance but it was in fairly good condition. Two and a half miles of rough timbered country intervened between the two wings. During the night, Davis and Sigel joined the right wing, so that when the rebels opened fire in the morning, they found the whole Union army in front of them. Had Curtis been mistaken as to the movements of the enemy and left Davis and Sigel at Lee Town, they would have had nothing in front of them while the combined rebel forces could soon have crushed Carr and Asboth, swung to the right and gobbled up the left wing in turn. On the other hand, had he brought Davis and Sigel over leaving Lee Town open, and the enemy had not concentrated, the rebel right wing could have marched through, attacked in the rear, and all

would have been over. Thus it is that, aside from his loyal and patriotic service during the entire war, Pea Ridge alone should place the name of General Curtis high among those who displayed marked military ability and generalship of a lofty order.

CHAPTER XVI

DELIRIUM

THERE was well-earned jubilation in Curtis's camp in Sugar Creek valley. The army had been fed and refreshed from the captured stores of the widely scattered enemy; and there was some hope that the surrounding country, though sparsely settled and already cruelly plucked, might even yet be able to yield something to the Commissary Department, sufficient at least with the welcome addition of the two or three days' rations taken from the fleeing Van Dorn to stay the hungry soldiers until they should be bidden to a fairer, more generous land — back to the railroad, perhaps, now that the way was once more open; but anywhere out of the wilderness. Moreover, Curtis's men were justly jubilant because at last they had battled face to face, fairly, and had won.

Marching orders came soon — north, sixteen miles, to Cross Timber Hollows, Missouri. Upon the Eighteenth devolved the duty of acting as rear guard during the army's progress northward. The movement began just at dusk and

when the rear guard swung into line, a drizzling rain was falling and the darkness was so heavy that one could not see the man marching in front of him. It was a slow and wearisome all-night march, with the cold, stinging rain falling steadily, but the men pressed forward doggedly over the almost impassable roads, more than once dropping off to sleep while they walked, only to be awakened by coming into violent and surprising contact with the file in front of them; then off to sleep again, dreaming of fluffy feather beds at home, or, mayhap, of old Aunt Salina Haskin's Broken-dish patchwork quilt, rotting this many a day by some far-away roadside. As they crossed the state line, when the dawn was just lifting her wan, wet face to survey these waifs of the sodden night, the band struck up, "Ain't I glad I'm out of the Wilderness," and the walking automatons woke up, echoing the sentiment right heartily, and proceeded with a brisker step; for they were possessed with a peculiar feeling that, short as the time had really been since they had gone down into Arkansas, and far from their own land as they yet were, they had been a long time gone and were coming home.

The army remained in camp at Cross Timber Hollow until some time in April; then it went around the mountains by West Plains, Missouri,

to Batesville, Arkansas. Of all the weary marches in which the Eighteenth had participated since the pursuit of Price first began, this one was the weariest. There were so many cold mountain streams to be waded, so many rough wooded hills to be climbed. It was a march to test the strength of the strongest. Only the hardest, perhaps not even those, came out of such marches as physically fit as when they went into them, and the strain of them told more in after years than that of many wounds.

It was on this march that Zachariah Posey, the sturdy backwoodsman, himself as immune from the ravages of fatigue as it is possible for healthy manhood to be, having much reserve stock to draw upon which he had carelessly amassed and packed away during all those years of his lazy, kindly, woodsy, open-air life, began observing Sammy with furtive, uneasy looks which grew more and more anxious and solicitous as the march grew in length and severity. There could be no doubt about it — Sammy was daily growing thinner and whiter, was more easily tired, displayed to the watchful eyes which loved him an alarming indifference to the external discipline of his company, and, yes, it must be confessed, developed a rapid, unprofitable growth of short temper wholly alien to his usual sunny disposition, which sorely puzzled and worried the ever

faithful Zack. It was plain to see that Sammy was fast reaching the limits of his endurance. Zack was mortally afraid that he would drop by the wayside, and what a calamitous thing that would be, for the army had come to the wilderness again. There would be no place for Sammy to be cared for if left behind. He would have to keep up with the army someway. "I 'low I could pack him on my back a right smart o' the way," thought Zack, pondering the possibilities.

But it was not until the army arrived in Batesville and went into camp not far away that Sammy dropped out. Towards the close of a day, with eyes unnaturally bright, he quietly toppled over, and was immediately sent to a house at the edge of the town, burning up with malarial fever, and to Zack's intense disgust and chagrin, Selvin was detailed to take care of the young officer. Zack was heartily glad that he had not been called upon to write to Selvin's mother, who was a woman of unquestioned "book l'arnin'," but he resented that detail almost as cordially. He wanted to take care of Sammy himself. But Selvin had his debt to pay, too, and he made a devoted nurse.

It was fully ten days before Sammy was strong enough to return to camp. Even then his weakness was aggravatingly insistent and gave him continuous reminders that its claims were para-

mount and that he would do well to stop wasting time fuming and fretting over his inability to walk quite steadily as yet, and to give his whole attention to building up his little strength and conserving it for some near future day when it would be required of him. He would not be able to bear it if the regiment marched away without him. He was not much used to looking after his own aches and pains — it had always been so promptly and efficiently done for him. But there was no thoughtful, watchful, tireless, tender mother to do for him now, no loving, admiring little sisters. He was face to face with one of the stern, terrifying realities of the homeless man — no woman to care for him when he is sick. However, Sammy was convalescent now, and he would never consent, never, to be left behind.

One night, soon after he had returned to camp, he was awakened by the drums beating the long roll. Instantly, he could hear officers along the line forming their companies. There was haste but little confusion. Sammy sat up, his brain throbbingly alert for the call of Company E. It is a weird and awful thing — the long roll at dead of night, when one must brush the mist of sleep from one's eyes in order to look death in the face. He is grimmer then, and startlingly strange, and one is very unready to meet him, one has so lately

come from a far-away, forgetful place, the land of dreams, for the purpose of this dread, unexpected meeting. The Captain slept in the adjoining tent, and Sammy listened in intent, painful surprise for the movement which would give earnest that the Captain was on duty. All was very quiet in the company commander's sleeping quarters. Sammy's head was reeling from the suddenness with which he had sat up, combined with his weakened condition, and queer points of light were darting hither and thither before his eyes. Was Company E asleep? Was she about to be dishonored — what, Company E of the old Eighteenth? He could stand it no longer and sprang to his feet with unthinking haste. His bare feet had scarcely touched the ground when he was assailed by a strange blindness and dizziness which caused him to put his hand to his forehead for a moment to help him to think what he had started out to do. He felt a little confused, somehow. Oh, yes, the long roll was beating! It was the call for help and Company E was asleep! He drew on his trousers with trembling haste, but forgot his coat and shoes. The need of swift action was great — greater than that he should dally with time, thinking of mere matters of detail in dress. Rushing out, he formed the company with a nicety of dispatch and efficiency that gained for it the dis-

tion of being second upon the flag line. It was not until then that the Captain arrived, fully dressed, with the sadly inadequate remark that he "had n't heard the alarm!"

By that time, Sammy was reeling in his steps and clutching his comrades for support, while queer, crazy notions floated through his head. He abruptly turned the command over to the delinquent Captain and started back to his tent. He had not gone far when his wandering attention was called to the unusual performance of a drummer, a confused, over-excited little German who had evidently been too abruptly aroused from his slumbers and had not yet recovered his equipoise. He was beating his drum with automatic conscientiousness, but its beats were accompanied by a rapid, monotonous, seemingly endless repetition of the unsolicited information that "I fights mit Sigel, Gott tamn it, I fights mit Sigel, Gott tamn it!" His broken English bore ample testimony of his extraction and probable identification with the St. Louis troops, so that the running repetition of the insistent avowal was ludicrously unnecessary; but Sammy was too far gone toward the realm of the fever-mad, delirium, to even smile at this fantastic idiosyncrasy. How he finally contrived to reach his own quarters, he never knew; nor did he hear the spicy remarks of the returning soldiers who

were chockful of racy resentment at being called out on what had proved to be a false alarm, and were not sparing in their epithets of blame toward the higher powers who had not realized it in time to prevent the flagrant waste of energy and sleeping hours. He had stumbled down upon his bed of army blankets and closed his eyes wearily upon the reeling world with its strange, darting points of light and its luminous blurs, and closed them as well upon the light of reason for many long, delirious weeks to come.

“Typhoid,” was the surgeon’s brief pronouncement, after a hasty but honest diagnosis of symptoms. “Severe attack and the devil of a start! Above all things, keep him quiet and look after him well.”

Quiet! Grim irony! The army moved soon, beginning its long march to Helena, and what was to be done with the fever patient then? Only one thing seemed practicable. He was hoisted to the top of a baggage wagon drawn by a six-mule team, and was jolted along in this sorry ambulance, under the blazing sun, day after day. But there was the faithful Zack to minister to the fever-parched young officer, and Selvin, too, both of whom had volunteered their services; so his straits were not so sore as they might have been. The jolting over the rough roads was terrible, however, and the heat of the bright, staring sun,

taken in conjunction with the heat of the burning fever, was intolerable.

"Water! Water!" was the sick man's constant cry. He babbled besides an unintelligible jargon of words and phrases, but ever returned to the suffering plaint, "Water! Water!" They gave him of what they could get, but most of the water along the way was noisome and unfit for use. It was a low, damp, hot, malarial region through which they were passing. Zack was at his wits' end. He was as near frantic as he had ever been in his life. What would he not have given for one brimming cup of the clear cold water from the spring back home! Or if only that ornery but well-beloved little old Crooked Creek might open up before his feet and go singing along on its graveled way!

There came a day which was insufferably hot. Sammy continued to moan for water, but the cry was becoming ever weaker and weaker until it came at last to seem that it must soon altogether die away. He was sore-spent with the unequal struggle. It could not last much longer. There is always a limit to human endurance. With a wild determination to get water somewhere — if he had to dig down into the bowels of the earth for it — Zack started away on a desperate quest, leaving Selvin in charge of the raving, sinking man. From an old negro who

was ambling along a lane lined on each side by sagging rail fences, he obtained the unexpected but welcome information that there was a well of "bery fine watah, sah, fines' in de lan', two-t'ree-fo' mile yondah way." In such haste to prove the truth of the ancient darky's statement was Zack that he scarcely tarried long enough for more definite directions before he had snatched up an old coffee pot and bounded away. It was noon when he left the crawling wagons. It was sun-down when he once more rejoined them. The old negro's "two-t're-fo' mile" had not dwindled away in the telling. Zack had traversed them all and a wide margin besides, and every one of them had been as a Chinese puzzle, due in part to the errors of misdirection and in part to failure to understand the true, and the solution of which puzzle, if it is really ever solved at all, must be merely stumbled upon at last. But he had the water — the old coffee pot and his canteen were running over with it — and Sammy drank while Zack blubbered with relief that the pitiful, incessant cry, answered, was stilled at last, if even for a very little while.

And then one day, Sammy awoke. His far-away gaze upon things unseen struggled earthward again, and rested vaguely, unquestioningly, upon the world around him. His vision was singularly clear, though he was conscious of that

odd removed feeling of one who has come back after long years but who is going away again very soon. He was lying flat upon the ground in a cornfield. The sun was beating down upon his head. It brought back — or rather continued — prolonged — the vague, confused, sickening turmoil of the wild, uncharted notions of his delirium, when his ravings had been mocked by the pitiless sun and spat upon by its fiery rain of glaring shine. He heard voices but he was strangely indifferent as to any word they spoke — any message they bore. Perhaps, if he had come to stay, he might have been more humanly curious; but seeming to realize right well that he would be going back again in a little while, he was placidly uninterested as to any specific thing these voices might be saying, and their meaning continued to drift beyond him while he gazed idly up into the shining sky. That is, for a time — an indefinite time — ages, perhaps — until one voice — a well-known voice, a well-loved voice — seeming to come through an infinity of space — but familiar as the sound of a mother's lullaby after long years of silence — penetrated his sinking consciousness.

“Is he dead?”

Now of whom could Colonel Washburn be speaking? Had there been a battle? There were no sounds of one in the air, he heard no

aftermath of groaning or sobbing. It was very quiet all around him. There was just the faintest rustling of the young green corn blades as the warm breeze gently stirred them; but that was all. And yet somewhere near some one was dying; for some one was saying — the Captain, of course, at least it was the same voice which had said a little while ago, years ago, rather, for all at once it seemed ages ago when at first it had seemed but a moment — “I did n’t hear the alarm” — this voice was saying:

“He was n’t a few minutes ago, but he soon will be. We laid him down there when we stopped for dinner. It’s easier for him there, poor fellow.”

If it was strange to think of a man’s dying right here, right now, it was stranger still to hear his Colonel swear. Sammy had never heard Colonel Washburn swear before. The provocation must be great.

“Dying then? And how could he be anything else after having been hauled over these cursed roads all these days in a baggage wagon, jolted and jammed into a jelly at every lurch, and his brains broiling alive meanwhile in the blazing sun! It’s shameful! It’s outrageous! That the man who saved the day for us at Pea Ridge should receive such treatment as this. They say that was a brilliant charge of mine which recap-

tured the battery and turned the tide of battle in our favor. I tell you, Captain, it would have been a miserable and a disgraceful flunk if that young Lieutenant there had not so gallantly rallied the broken line when the Twenty-second bolted! Do n't stand there like a blithering idiot! Have a stretcher brought from my headquarters at once! There's a house over there—it's Union—see that he is taken there without an instant's delay. Detail some trusty fellow to nurse him—one of his friends. A boy like that has a plenty, I'll wager! We'll pull him through yet if we can. The Union has need of him."

Brave words spoken of some one. Now who could that some one be? It must be a fine thing to deserve well of one's Colonel, especially one like the Colonel of the old Eighteenth. Perhaps, if he were going to stay, even he might some day win words of commendation like those. They would make everything worth while—a million times worth while. But he was going away right soon now—he could n't stay if he wanted to—and he was very tired—too tired to linger even long enough to see who the lucky fellow was of whom the Colonel was speaking—and how far away the Colonel was getting—his voice seemed to come from an immense distance—it was growing fainter and fainter—all other sound was stopped up and only a singing silence

remained. He was on the point of going off — off — into space. His fingers were oddly itching. Queer lights danced before his eyes. The Colonel's voice drifted away into nothingness. He was gone.

Not quite — or was he coming back again? He lay listening idly for the rustle of the corn blades in the wind, and wondered if Colonel Washburn had gone quite away. He was calmly happy and content. The sun was going down. It had glared so all the time, but now it was faintly mellow, cheerfully subdued, graciously restful to tired eyes and head. The breeze must have died away, too, with the coming of evening, for the corn was still. He would lie there all night in the heavenly coolness and quiet; and the hell of noise and confusion and jolting and wild thoughts would be no more. He buried his hands in the soft, worked soil — just to feel the good clean dirt between his fingers. Why, a cornfield was just like home. How many years had he and Herbert ploughed and planted and cultivated in just such fields as this! What was this he had hold of? Not a sheet surely? A sheet in a cornfield? Oh, no! The boys had made him a bed there of course. But there were no sheets in the army. And this was one over him, too. Was he still dreaming? He felt altogether too drowsily comfortable and at peace for that. Dreams were hideous night-

mares, and this, why, this was the very antipodes of nightmare. Was it possible that he had been bathed — first in warm, soapy water, and then in deliciously clear and cool? He had no recollection of it, but he felt as if he had. It was a familiar feeling. He had felt exactly that way often after he had come in dirty and over-heated from the thrashing, perhaps, and his mother had helped him with just such a resty, luxurious bath, and he had then snuggled down to calm, untroubled sleep. He was very sleepy now. He should drift off presently. He felt that he would be glad to go this time. He was just tired enough and rested enough from his bath and drowsy enough from its languorous influence to welcome the sinking into sweet and dreamless forgetfulness; but first he must figure out — sheets and a clean gown in a cornfield with the sun setting — oh, no, it was the lamp setting — but lamps do n't set — and yet here was a lamp burning dimly on the table. Now where did it come from? It was good of old Zack to stay by him and rub his head. It had throbbed so all along; but it was easier now. Cornfields were the very devil of places for ghosts. Suppose Zack should see a "hant?" Would he stay or would he run? "Stay, Zack," he whispered. "Do n't leave me, old chap. I — I'm pretty weak — and you know there are no ghosts. I've told you so a thousand times."

“What is it? Did you speak? Is there something you want?”

A woman's voice — by cracky! He might have known! Zack's horny hand could never have given that soft, light, soothing touch in all its born days of chopping, climbing, hunting and fishing. A woman's voice! He was in a house. He had on clean linen. He lay between clean, sweet-smelling sheets. He *believed* he had been bathed. He was very grateful for all these things but languidly unconcerned as to how they had come about. He accepted the situation unquestioningly. However, he should like to know who the woman was. She was a right royal one — he knew that. He should like to know her name.

“Who are you?” he asked.

This time she understood.

“I am Ben Rebeir's wife — Ben Rebeir, the scout, you know,” she replied, softly. “Had n't you better go to sleep now?” and Sammy, docilely acquiescent, went to sleep.

For the third time, Sammy opened his eyes to the light of consciousness, and for the second time to the touch of a gentle, womanly hand upon his forehead. Whoever Ben Rebeir, the scout, might be, his wife was a queen among women. There was no denying that. He felt more comfortable than he had for a long, weary while, and he lay quietly in the clean white bed, too weak to

question, too content to wonder — just drinking in the bright morning sunshine which came pouring in through the open window, and reveling in the light cool breeze playing upon his face. Birds were chirping, twittering, calling to each other from the summer-laden boughs of the trees outside his window. From somewhere near, a horse whinnied, and then a dog barked; and mingled with these other pleasant, homey sounds, he could hear a hen clucking to her brood of downy chicks, and heard their soft, wondering, young peep, peep, peep, as they followed her trustingly around this strange, big, beautiful world into which they had been born. In another part of the house, a woman was singing softly to the not in-harmonious accompaniment of the clink and splash of dishes being washed. It was all very homey, very sweet and restful. Could it be possible that he was back home on the little Indiana farm? He began to think so. No hand but mother's could stroke a tired forehead so tenderly, so comfortingly, so altogether satisfyingly, as that. He had been ill and they had sent him home to get well. God was good — and so was Colonel Washburn.

“Is that you, mother?” he asked, simply, the memory of Ben Rebeir's wife thousands of miles away just then.

The hand was quickly withdrawn, but the

verbal response was not so quick. In fact, "mother" was a long time in answering. Then a low voice, an infinitely sweet and gentle and womanly voice said, softly:

"No, this is not your mother. This is your nurse. You have been very ill but you are much better now."

Sammy was silent for a little while, taking this in. He had been so long gone that he could not re-adjust himself to worldly affairs without much mental labor.

"You are still Ben Rebeir's, the scout's, wife then?" he asked at last, slowly, without turning his head from its comfortable angle on the pillow. "Pardon me if I seem — unduly inquisitive. Things change so — it is hard to keep a grasp on them — in their dizzy flights. You have been very good to me. If you are not my mother, I am glad you are Ben Rebeir's wife," he added, with just a touch of his old whimsicality.

"I am sorry to disappoint you so often," the delicious voice contradicted, smilingly, "but I am not Ben Rebeir's wife."

This was a poser. It bowled Sammy, with his pride of newly-gained consciousness, completely over. Evidently, he was going away again — or was already gone. For here was another mystery, and a mystery had directly preceded every one of his previous goings-away. Here was nei-

ther cornfield nor scout's wife nor the dream of home nor the horror of delirium — but that last would surely come again if he were indeed going off. Oh, if he could only hold himself from going! Why, he was being granted a little grace! He was staying longer than ever before! He was still here! Could it be that he was here to stay this time? It was too good to be true!

There was no doubt that Sammy had progressed in his unconscious struggle for life, for in place of the old indifference as to whom certain voices belonged which had sometimes inexplicably stood forth alone out of the myriads of voices and hellish confusion of his delirium, he all at once developed an over-weening curiosity as to the ownership of the voice which did not belong to Ben Rebeir's wife. To his grateful surprise he found he could turn his head if he gave his undivided attention to the transaction — so he turned it, and rested his tired, sunken blue eyes, shadow-circled, full upon the roguishly smiling, finger-pressed-to-lips face of Sara Brown. This surprise was so much greater than any which had preceded it, and so different, that it must not be allowed to slip away into the mists of vague unrealism whither those others had gone before; and yet he was too weak to give vent to it, to exclaim over it, or to wonder at it. He could only look up at her happily, contentedly, without question.

Presently, he whispered with the shadow of a smile:

"Was n't there a cellar to hide in this time?"

She shook her head smilingly.

"At least, I don't know whether there is or not," she said. "I have n't had time to investigate the possibilities in that direction. You have kept us all pretty busy with your — tantrums."

"Us all?"

"To be sure — Zack, and Mr. Selvin, and Mrs. Rinehart, and John, and me. It took us all. You have been an obstreperous patient."

"Mrs. Rinehart?"

"Your hostess."

"Then who was — Ben Rebeir's wife?"

"She nursed you before you were brought to Helena. You were there a week. When you are well, which won't be very soon if you persist in keeping up this gossip, you must never forget that you owe your life to — the scout's wife."

"I shall not forget." He closed his eyes wearily. The strain of even this short conversation had nearly exhausted him. He opened them soon, however. There was something he must say. "Nor you," he whispered. "Neither shall I forget you. It seems that I have had two guardian angels when I — needed them sorely. What have I ever done to deserve it? Some day, when I'm stronger I will say, 'Thank you!'"

"I only helped the boys. You must thank them. Mrs. Rinehart was too busy a woman to devote all her time to you. Some one else was needed. It was Zack who told me about you. I met him on the street one day. Those boys have been wonderful nurses. Your old Captain told me how faithfully they had stood by you night and day all the way from Batesville."

"They are the best friends a man ever had," said Sammy, simply.

"And now you must *not* talk any more," said Sara, with quiet firmness. She moved softly about the bed, arranged the pillows deftly, and smoothed the crumpled, patch-work counterpane. From a small table near-by, neatly covered with a spotless damask napkin gladly brought forth at the instigation of that sweet new nurse from the drawer where the "company things" were so zealously and so religiously hoarded, she took a bowl and a silver spoon and sat down at the bedside. She was unchanged except that the womanly little face was older and sadder looking than the few short months warranted. Perhaps she had seen much of war since last they had met — much of its suffering and woe. It hurt him to think of it. Always she was in the enemy's country. If only he might persuade her to go North. He would try — when he was strong enough to rejoin his regiment. Meanwhile, there were a

million and one things he must know about her before he dared to sleep. The continued presence of his normal mind was telling upon his bump of curiosity.

"Are you a regular army nurse now?" he asked, with elaborate carelessness, and with a deep intent to frustrate her evident intention of tolling him off to sleep.

"For this case, anyway," she assured him, lightly. "The boys have put me in charge. They were all fagged out, poor fellows — but that was far from being the chief reason for my installment as head nurse. They thought that I might be able to 'boss' you better and — I think I am. So you are to take your nourishment at once and then go to sleep. You talked enough when you were out of your head to last you a long, long time. Now go to sleep."

He took the thin gruel docilely at first because her hand gave it — then eagerly and his eyes pleaded for more.

"Enough for this time," she announced, calmly, but with a firmness not to be gainsayed. She stepped quietly to the open window through which was wafted the fragrance of June roses and honeysuckle and lowered the blind. "Let's play it's night now and go to sleep," she added, with gentle insistence.

There was much of the capable, well-trained

nurse in her quiet, watchful, efficient, plainly gowned presence; but there was a touch of the maternal, also, in the compassionate sympathy, the hovering tenderness, and Sammy found himself drifting deliciously along on the calm strength of that God-given combination until he was about to sink into the depths of the restful, peaceful slumber which was the earnest of his turn for the better — at last, when he roused himself to ask drowsily:

“ You did n’t tell me after all.”

“ Will you promise me to go to sleep if I tell you that one thing?”

“ Yes.”

“ Well, then, I have helped some — I hope to do more. I am a volunteer — like you, not a regular.”

“ Are we in Helena?”

“ We are. I told you that before.”

“ When did you come here?”

“ I shall not tell you,” she reproved him, gravely. “ You have broken your promise, bad little boy.”

“ My head feels awfully funny. Rub it, won’t you, as you were doing when I woke up?”

He was not so far gone but that he hoped for a little rush of tell-tale color in her face or a hint of shyness in the calm, sincere eyes, and was deeply chagrined when he saw them not.

"Sleep is far better than hands for aching heads," she vouchsafed, judicially.

"Where did you find your father?" he asked.

No answer.

"Is he here with you?"

No answer.

"Did you get my last letter telling about that young Selvin lad? He found himself at Pea Ridge, I think. He will make a good soldier."

Continued silence.

"Did you have any more trouble with Guerillas?"

She arose and tiptoed softly to the door.

"Zack will be just outside — should you need anything," she said.

"Oh, please come back," he pleaded, plaintively, in a very panic of remorse. "I'll be good. I never could go to sleep if you left me now for I'd fear you'd never come back. Please! I'm most gone now," he wheedled.

He smiled contentedly when she once more returned to his bedside as if she were humoring a fractious child.

"I'm going — I'm gone — good-night, good little girl."

But just before he really was off, he felt again that soft cool touch upon his forehead and sank smilingly to sleep.

Another time, at twilight, when a summer rain



June days

was falling, straight and warm and gentle before the open window, he awoke from a long sleep and asked her whom Colonel Washburn had meant — back there in the cornfield. He had been dreaming.

Oddly enough, she evinced no surprise. Perhaps Zack had told her — perhaps Colonel Washburn himself. She leaned over him with a baffling expression in her eyes.

“Why, he meant you, *Captain*,” she said, and glided from the room.

Those June days following were the newly commissioned young Captain's beads of devotion — but they could not last. He could not hold them and count them over and over. In a week, he was so much stronger that a change was the next move in the natural order of military events. It was through Zack who had accidentally met her upon the street one day that Sara Brown had come to nurse him. With Zack's connivance, she sent word to Herbert Goodman who appeared upon the scene, bronzed and grave from his arduous, devoted service at the front, but the comfortable, capable, trusted, idolized big brother still, and who bore the pale shadow of Sammy off to Jefferson Barracks where he proceeded to nurse and diet him back to health again.

CHAPTER XVII

HOME ON LEAVE OF ABSENCE

THE old Eighteenth, now a worthy regiment indeed since the "making fit" campaign against Sterling Price and the trial by fire at Pea Ridge, was back in Missouri, and the heart of Sammy yearned toward it mightily. Jefferson Barracks was a prison, the "flowery ease" palled. Surgeon Herbert was an inexorable tyrant — though between times, when the grave, worn surgeon was forgotten in the big brother, lying at length upon the soft green turf under spreading trees outside Ward D where Sammy was convalescing, with gaze idly wandering over the old wooden barracks occupying three sides of the square, also utilized for hospital purposes, or staring dreamily upwards into the far away, shimmering blue sky flecked with diaphanous white clouds, or watching Hospital Corps assistants in their tidy uniforms softly flitting hither and thither on their errands of service, the two brothers grew very close together indeed, closer than they had ever been before, even when they had loved each other most. Eleven domineered

over seven; seventeen merely tolerated thirteen; but the twenties recognized no digits between, neither ascending nor descending — perhaps because the shadow of the coming parting, which in war time may always be but the projection of the shadow of the longer parting, blotted them all out — and twenty-four and twenty were comrades in the truest sense of the word.

Finally, neither the surgeon, big brother, nor comrade could hold Sammy longer. He was discharged from the hospital and immediately rejoined his company. The regiment spent the entire fall and winter campaigning in Missouri. There was little real fighting, but many bitter marches in inclement weather, and the results of the long arduous campaign were very meager. Most of the time was spent in following bands of Guerrillas who would never stand and fight, but, when approached, would scatter and fade away into the mountains. But at the close of it, the Eighteenth was hardened to the fine durability of steel. It was, pitifully enough, the survival of the fittest; but those fit were very fit, indeed, hard-muscled, lean, keen-eyed, strong of nerve and will. And how soon they had need of it all!

About the first of April Sammy secured a leave of absence, his first, and a few days later, came into his home town of Huntingburg on the

stage. Many and many a time around the camp fire, on the march, he had dreamed of coming home like this, and wondered if it was ever to be. And now he was come, and on a day of his dreams, a day in the spring of the year, when the air was warm and balmy, and pink and sweet with the color and scent of peach blossoms; when all the birds were singing joyously of reunion and nesting and long summer days. The woods were full of birds. They flashed through the flecks of sunshine on the shaded old stage road. They balanced themselves nicely on slender wings which quivered beneath their airy burden, cocking feathery heads at the lumbering stage wagon, and peering cunningly through the veil of new green leaves, or scolding deliciously at the unwonted intrusion — all unafraid, but poised for instant flight if it should prove an unexpected danger. Yes, he was coming home at last, home to be coddled and waited upon and admired; home to sleep in a soft, billowy, feather bed — oh, the hard, ungiving ground of a bivouac — home to awaken in the fragrant, dewy morning to the pleasant sound of frying chicken or sputtering ham, to catch and to hold the delicious aroma of real coffee, and to turn over restfully with the comfortable realization that there was no hurry, mother would keep it hot. Oh, the hard-tack and the beans and the parched corn and the “dish-

water" that had honor thrust upon it when it was undeservedly called coffee! And oh, the hurry in the gloom and damp of the early dawn, and the weariness and the dreariness of it — and the heart-clutching roll of the drums! A day of his dreams! A day in tune with his joyous thoughts!

To his surprise, he had no sooner leaped from the stage, his feet seemingly as light as his heart, than he was literally surrounded by old friends and acquaintances clamoring for recognition, for a word, a hand-shake. He had sent no word of his coming. He was still young enough to enjoy perpetrating a surprise on the folks at home. So long had he been as a grain of sand on the sea-shore, as a leaf in the forest, as a blade of grass on the prairie — one of many — that he had forgotten how clothed in importance was a returning son to a small community, and how far a brave new uniform can be seen on the highroad, when the hearts of people see uniforms in their dreams at night, sometimes bonny and blue — sometimes bonny and gray — oh, many, many times, dimmed and torn and darkly red.

"Howdy, Sammy!" "Howdy, there, Sammy Goodman!" "Lord, Lord, ef it ain't Sammy Goodman in the flesh, I don't know what I'm a-talkin' about!" "Sammy Goodman — an' I've knowed him sence he was knee-high-ter-a grasshopper! An' he's home — an' he ain't got

kilt yit — well, well, I swan ter goodness!” “We’re powerful glad ter see you safe home, Sammy. Yer mam’ll be purt-nigh flabbergasted with surprise. She ’lowed jist yistiddy when she was ter town that they’d wait till you was dead before they’d let you come home.” These and similar greetings kept Sammy busy smiling and shaking hands first with this one and then with that, but, glad as he was to see them all, his heart hungered to be on the old woods trail, flying home to the “hewed log” cabin on Crooked Creek.

“How’ll they git along without you, Sammy?” one friendly wag demanded in pretended concern. “The Union would n’t dast ter fight without you! Did the Johnny Rebs grant a truce jist ter ’low you ter take a run down home for a few days? Golly Moses! How us all do shine with reflected glory!”

“No use fighting till I get back, Mart!” retorted Sammy, with like and ready good nature. “It would only be a wicked waste of good powder and shot. The Johnnies are n’t as dumb as you think they are. They’ll wait for me, never fear!”

“What’s the news? Give us the news, Sammy!” implored the older and graver heads. “Where’s Grant now? Is he ever going to take Vicksburg? How many men’s he got? Ain’t

he awful slow about it? Where's the Eighteenth now? Why did n't Zack Posey come back with you for a furlough? Do you 'low Grant's a good general?"

But he broke away at last and was off on the home stretch — a mile and a half, now through sunny cleared fields already green with tiny shoots of growing things, the old familiar road bordered here and there with rail fences over which tangled blackberry vines, already bursting into leaf and flower, clambered riotously, now through strips of timber, softly shadowed, it, too, vibrant with the multitudinous murmuring of the beginnings of life, of bird and beast and crawling thing. This time, Sammy watched a tiny snake wriggle out of his path to the safety of the tangle of wayside undergrowth without lifting his hand against it, and smiled, remembering another day when he had killed a snake, just because it was a snake, when he was unaccountably loath to do it. He understood himself better now. Ah, life, life, life! Have not all an inherent right to it? If some one must answer for war, must not some one also, sometime, have to answer for killing even snakes? God gave them life. And God said, "Thou shalt not kill!" But how then, if they be poison — *one can keep out of the way!* It is a large world. There is much room in it. But, a righteous war — ah,

well, God pity those who make a righteous war necessary, not them who must fall in it!

In boyish glee, Sammy left the road which ran directly past the house, when he was about a quarter of a mile from home, and struck through a last bit of timber. This would insure his not being seen until he wished it — until he was upon them — when he would walk into their presence, the presence of mother and sisters, unannounced — from nowhere — and watch the look of startled surprise leap into instant and joyous and loving recognition.

When almost within hailing distance and the trees were thinning, though still veiling the house, he heard voices, and, stepping softly, he slipped from tree to tree until he was close enough to observe the speakers and to distinguish their words, himself safely concealed behind the trunk of a giant beech, with a further screening of a thin thicket of ash. He had not been mistaken in the sweet, treble, earnest voice of the child. It belonged to his little sister, Ama Jane. She stood looking valiantly, even defiantly, up into the face of a big, loosely knit, slouching-formed fellow — Bob Halstead! He was nowhere in the army then. Sometime ago, Mollie had written — in the vein of scorn which all young women and *nearly* young women of that day, especially they of the border states

where the war spirit was an all pervasive spirit, to the absolute subordination, nay, to the well-nigh extinction of aught else, employed in thinking or speaking of those young men who, for one reason or another, had not enlisted, were not at the front — that Bob Halstead was still hanging around holding to his mother's apron strings, she reckoned. "Too bad he is n't old enough to go to the war," she had added, with the righteous irony of those whose nearest and dearest had gone. "Seems a pity when he's so big — and the Union needs big men, does n't it, Sammy? And if, as people are saying, he should fight on the other side, maybe he'd be killed in battle. Anyway, he would n't be doing the harm that he is here, even if he was n't killed. I think that a sneak is lots worse than a brave man if he is on the wrong side, don't you, Sammy?" And he had wondered what Bob Halstead was up to, now.

Ama Jane's dark, tangled locks shaded a peculiarly earnest, forceful, positive, but, withal, piquant little face, with eyes of deepest Sammy-blue; and the look of self-confidence, of unshakable assurance, and of rapt hero-worship with which she faced her antagonist in what was evidently a hotly pitched word-duel, was startlingly amusing to Sammy, even while his heart swelled with tenderness for her stanch companionship.

"Where is Sammy now?" he heard Bob ask.

"He's in Company E, Eighteenth Indiana Regiment, fighting for the Government, trying to make a settlement, why aren't you there?" replied Ama Jane, promptly, fearlessly, proudly, her voice limpid yet with the baby lisp.

"Great Caesar's ghost!" thought Sammy, in a panic lest he should laugh and spoil it all, while all the strings of him thrummed with the sweetness of her touch upon the harp of his big brother being. "Is that my little sister, Ama Jane Goodman? Now, I'd like to know who put her up to all that? She always was an original little rip and I'll wager she just gathered that stuff together her own little elfin self from listening to her elders."

"Oh, and you think I'd ought to be, do you, little smarty?" demanded Bob, sourly. ("If you can't appreciate that, Bob," said Sammy to himself, "you are worse than I thought you were!") "Well, if I was in the war, I'd be on the other side. How'd you like that?"

"That's what mam said, but she said you were such a big coward you were afraid to fight on either side."

"Have a care, little sister," breathed Sammy. "Do n't badger or trust him too far. He might have a bat somewhere around handy. I am mighty glad I am here!"

“Your mam’s too smart. The boys are all a-gettin’ down on her for doin’ so much talkin’. She ’d better keep her old mouth shut or she ’ll wish she had.”

Sammy stepped from behind the concealing tree and came forward. Not so very long ago, he would have been in a towering rage and would have demanded instant satisfaction for those words. Even now, had there been outsiders who might have misunderstood them or their source, he might have fought then and there for the honor of “mam” as he had done for the honor of “pap” years ago, but there was no one present but loyal Ama Jane and himself, no one unless one counted the birds and the other folk of the forest. There was no need to resent the attitude of a snake in the grass who had hissed when a good woman went by — and Bob was like to a snake — let him wriggle away to safety and live his little life in peace — with the rest of the hissing kind.

“You are a mighty brave young man, Bob, when it comes to fighting women and children —” he began, but got no farther, for, with a wild scream of rapture, Ama Jane threw herself into the arms of her idolized brother.

“Oh, Sammy, where did you come from? Oh, I am so glad, so glad! Sammy, Sammy, Sammy, my Sammy! Is the war over? Did we beat? Are

you home to stay? Oh, my Sammy, my Sammy, my Sammy!" she cried over and over again in ecstasy.

Sammy himself was much moved. The baby sister was very, very dear to him. She had been such a tiny, helpless thing when the father had been forced to leave her; and in his boyish way, meeting the responsibility which had come to him after the tragedy of all their lives, he had tried to father the little elfin creature, the pathos of whose life was that she could never know the worth of what she had lost. Over her dark head and clinging arms, he looked up to complete his greeting to Bob Halstead.

"I seem to have heard that you are not alone, that there are others around here — like you — who are too cowardly to fight for principle but who very bravely stay at home and nag and pester the families of men who are absent fighting for their country."

"Oh, you need n't think because you've been away fightin' for niggers that you kin come home and swell around and talk big. Jist because one or two struttin' uniforms pertend to love 'em does n't make this a nigger-lovin' country. And you had best be purty civil to the boys if you ain't hankerin' to turn up missin' some of these here nights," boasted Bob, pridefully, bolstered up by the secret but strengthening knowledge

that in real but unguessed truth he was not standing alone.

"Oh, as to that, I should n't be at all surprised if a gang of you crept up behind me some pitch dark night and stabbed me in the back. Go ahead," continued Sammy, in his larger tolerance attaching a too little importance, perhaps, to the braggadocio threats of — one of the shirkers. "I'll take my chances with a bunch like you. Come along, Ama, where are mother and Mollie?"

It was a happy time for the Goodmans. If Mollie and Ama Jane had been proud of Sammy in his "store clothes," how much more were they vain of his appearance in the new uniform that fitted his straight, soldierly figure so trimly. Though he was lean from the long, severe campaigning in Missouri, his shoulders were broadened and he had in every way grown into the full stature of a man. It soon became noised about in every nook and corner of the neighborhood that he had come home and friends came trooping in to bid him welcome and to inquire the latest news from the front; and Sammy, ever peculiarly sensitive to the good-will of his friends, basked in the genial warmth of the universal wonder and adulation. If, at times, he was a trifle condescending to some of the humble, unlettered folk who came to do him honor, he was none the less

their friend — and grateful — and it will be remembered in excuse for Sammy that he was not very old yet, and that the bitterest part of the war was yet to come. He could never be rightly accused of condescension after the Vicksburg campaign, which was very soon to call out the best that there was in those mighty men, Grant's soldiers, who cleared the great highway of the Mississippi for the better treading of that better righteousness — "Justice to all."

Among the first to come were the Poseys, man and wife and wild little brood of tow-heads.

"An' how air Zack?" asked Mrs. Posey, as soon as etiquette permitted the question, which was not until all the polite conventions of the backwoods had been complied with, as, for instance, "Land, how you have growed!" "You're a-lookin' right peart." "My, that air new uniform is purty — it sets you off powerful well." "An' those things over your shoulder, they're a captain's, be they? An' you got promoted after Pea Ridge?" "I 'low that air were a happy day fer your mam." "When did you git here?" "When did you start?" "Can't you come over ter sepper an' set awhile?" "Leave General Grant well?" "How long you goin' ter stay?"

But Sammy understood how she longed to hear about Zack and he rattled off answers to the polite inquiries as fast as he could and with

the fewest words. He himself was much relieved when her "society manner" finally permitted the putting of the question which was so near her heart.

"Oh, Zack's getting along fine," he said, with enthusiasm. "He's the best and bravest man in my company all right — and that's saying a good deal. He's tough as a — rhinoceros and never gets sick and so far has never been wounded, more than a mere scratch now and then. He sent his love and a 'howdy,' and I'm glad to be able to tell you that he will be home in about a week now on a well-earned furlough. Had no trouble at all in getting it. He's got a mighty good reputation as a soldier, Zack has. He's in the way of being a regimental hero, too, since he rode up all alone to that Peoria battery at Pea Ridge and with such cool effrontery demanded the Johnnie Rebs to cease firing!"

"Zack always were brave," sniffed Mrs. Posey, from a full heart. "I 'lowed he'd be jist fool enough ter go an' do it all alone. Do you 'low he'll be kilt afore he gits that air furrow, Sammy?"

"Not a bit of it," declared Sammy, stoutly. "Don't get that into your head. Why, Zack bears a charmed life."

And then Aunt Salina Haskins blew in, little and gray and wiry as ever, her lined face radiant

with the joy of the news-gatherer and news-disperser on the trail of a good story. Sammy Goodman home from the war! Verily, she would have come sooner had she known sooner of his arrival.

"My Broken Dish come in purty handy?" she inquired, casually, after all the preliminaries which had so irked the craving mother soul of Mrs. Posey had been disposed of.

"Why, yes, yes, indeed, Aunt Salina," replied Sammy, cordially, but in a panic of fear for what further questioning might bring to light.

"Wear well?"

"I should say so! But — things have to go through a deal of rough usage in the army, you know. They do n't last so long as they do at home."

"I 'low it's about seen its best days then. Well, it's wore out in a good cause — if my grandson does n't think so," said Aunt Salina, complacently. "It's still a-holdin' tergeth'er yit though, I 'low? The pieces was mostly new muslin and caliker."

"Well, to tell the truth," said Sammy, desperately, hoping to fend off being completely cornered, "it is practically worn out. I'm afraid we'll have to give it up."

"You kin cut the good parts into strips an' use 'em for sca'fs gin winter comes," proffered

Aunt Salina, thriftily. "You do that, Sammy. I 'low there 'll be a plenty for you an' Zack an' mebbe a strip ter spare for some pore feller who ain't got no folks at hum ter do for him. Will you remember, Sammy?"

"I 'll do my best. It's a good suggestion," said Sammy, his mouth twitching at the unconscious humor of her persistence in the light of the real and irrevocable fate of the Broken Dish. "I had n't thought of that before. Thank you a thousand times, Aunt Salina — and how's Susie?" Thus he trod upon solid ground again.

As the Poseys were leaving, Zachariah the elder motioned for Sammy to come out of doors.

"I 'low you 've heerd tell 'bout the things that have been goin' on round these here parts lately?" he drawled, when they were alone.

"Not very much," replied Sammy. "I have done so much talking myself since I came home that I am afraid I have n't given anybody much of an opportunity to tell me anything. What's up now? Is the ghost still haunting Hank's house?"

"Well, fer purt' nigh a year nobody ever saw or heerd ary thing o' the hant, but lately it has come back agin. Howsomever, I wa'n't a-thinkin' o' the hant when I called you out here, but o' the gang what calls theirselves the Knights o' the Golden Circle."

"I have heard something about such an organization. It is composed of rebels who are too cowardly to go to war, is n't that about it?"

"You hit the nail on the head that air time, Sammy. That's jist the kind o' copperheads they be."

"Have they ever done anything or do they merely talk and threaten? Do you think they send supplies to the South?"

"Whenever they git the chanct, they do that air very thing."

"Anything else?"

"You remember Mrs. Orton, Sammy?"

"Yes."

"Well, she's been a-talkin' purty strong an' callin' these here fellers cowards fer not fightin' fer their country, an' one night 'bout a week ago, they tuk her out an' whipped her an' tol' her ter keep her mouth shet after this. An' Jim Strong's boy was home two or three weeks ago an' he went round quite a bit tryin' ter git some o' the boys ter enlist, an' one mornin' he was found by the roadside shot dead. We 'low it were the Knights o' the Golden Circle."

"I suppose Bob Halstead belongs?"

"He shore do, an' some thinks that Hank is back an' takin' a part. Now, what I wanted ter say ter you specially was that you must be on your guard constant agin these here fellers. Bob

an' Hank do n't love you none, nohow, an' I'm powerful a-feared somethin' 'll happen ter you — ef you ain't right smart keerful."

"Thank you Mr. Posey," said Sammy, earnestly. "You are — you have always been — a good friend. I shall keep my eyes open — depend upon that. I, too, believe that Hank is back. I sometimes think that he was never very far away — except for spasmodic jaunts with his Guerrilla brethren — and I do not doubt that he is one of the leaders of these Knights of the Golden Circle. It is altogether likely that the gang hold their meetings in Hank's old house. When Zack gets home, we 'll go after that ghost again and *this* time he won't get away."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE REAPPEARANCE OF THE GHOST

ZACK had been at home but a few short hours when Sammy projected a cloud upon his happy horizon of long hours for sleep, good things to eat, and much time for love-making and flaunting a soldier's uniform, as unexpected and as startling as a clap of thunder from a clear sky.

"Now, Sammy," he expostulated, despairingly, "that air 's too bad. You had n't orter ast me ter do that. You know I 'm skeered ter death o' hants. I would n't 've 'plied for a furlough if I 'd knowed you was a-goin' ter lug me off hant-huntin' agin. 'T ain't fair."

"Oh, of course, if you do n't want to go, I 'll go by myself. I waited for you to come. I thought two heads would be better than one, and there 's no one else I 'd care to trust — except your dad, and it 's hardly fair to ask him. They might shoot, you know, but you and I are used to that. I thought you had certainly outgrown that silly superstition after all the real dangers you have lived through."

“ Oh, if it was only shootin’ that a body had ter be a-feared of!” said Zack, dismissing that premise with an indifferent shrug of the shoulders, but returning dismally to the fateful topic of the ghost. “ But a hant! There ’s no countin’ on a hant, ’cause there do n’t nobody know what a hant ’s meanin’ ter up an’ do — ”

“ Then you would rather not go? ”

“ O’ course I ’d ruther not go,” exclaimed Zack, in exasperation. “ But that ’s not a-sayin’ I ain’t a-goin’. If you ’re set on bein’ a idjit, I ’low I might as well be one, too. I ’low the company ’d ride me on a rail clear ter Kingdom Come if I went back without you. So, if you ’re kilt or spirited away, I might as well be, too. But ’t ain’t fair. It ’s ornery mean, that ’s what it is. Seems like I ain’t never a-goin’ ter git no rest.”

“ When do you thing it would be best to go? ”

“ Not till I ’ve seen Susie, anyhow. I come home ter see her — an’ pap an’ mam — an’ the young ’uns — not hants,” replied Zack disconsolately.

“ Will you go with me tomorrow night? ” persisted Sammy, relentlessly; then, a sudden memory of Zack’s dogged devotion and untiring care during those interminable thirsty weeks when he tossed in fever coming over him, he added, his voice breaking a little, “ You have never failed me yet, Zack. You know whom I am trying to

run to earth — and you know why. And now there is a thousand times more reason why. My father does n't need vengeance now — but I believe that the safety and happiness — perhaps the lives — of my mother and sisters, and of yours, Zack, are in danger. Shall we go tomorrow night?"

"Yes, Captain!" said Zack, unconsciously saluting, not only his superior officer, as he would have done had they both been back with the regiment on the Mississippi, but this new call to duty as well. Duty, duty, duty! Zack's heart was right, and besides he had been trained to it in a rigid school — war is a hard, hard master — he would not fail, but from the depths of his old nature, slow, easy-going, careless, shiftless, would ever come now and then the hurt, fretful cry, "Seems like I ain't never goin' ter git no rest."

They did not wait in the attic for a ghostly illumination this time, but at midnight the two set out quietly for the deserted house. The April woods were dark, still, and heavily redolent of blossoming locust and poplar and other sweet-scented flowering things, and deep in slumber except for the occasional drowsy chirp of a bird or the slipping away of some small creature disturbed underfoot. They spoke no word but pressed on side by side, each intent upon his own thoughts. As they came out into the clearing,

they saw a light suddenly flash out from a window in the front room. Zack gasped and instantly began to shake — his old uncontrollable fear of the supernatural laying a clammy hand upon all his nerve centers — but he kept valiantly on until, as they drew nearer, shrieks, unearthly moans and long wailing issued from the house and made night at once hideous and fearsome. They were overdoing the part to-night. In that would be their downfall. So Sammy reasoned, and so he believed, and yet, oddly enough, there entered into his consciousness at that moment, the same prickly, unearthly sensation which had raised the hair on his head that June night of two years ago when, after diligent search, he had acknowledged to himself that there was no place where the ghost might have gone — except through the wall, or vanished into space. As for Zack, he faltered, drew back, came to a dead halt. But Sammy had no thought of consideration for him then. The situation was too intense to admit it. He dragged his reluctant companion almost to the very door, sagging on its hinges.

“Remember, Zack,” he said, in an impressive whisper, “the ghost is not to get away this time! Whatever happens, he is not to get away! *Whatever happens! Remember that!* It is like that charge. We just dare not break! You stay

here. Keep in the shadow so you can't be seen or — surprised, and watch out for Hank or any one else. No one is to come in until I have routed out this masquerader. If Hank shows up, you will know what to do. My plan is to creep to the door and then rush in so suddenly and unexpectedly that Mr. Ghost will be taken by surprise. He will then be easy prey."

Zack agreed to this arrangement with alacrity.

"Now, you're talkin'," he said, approvingly. "I'd a heap sight ruther stay out here an' meet Hank, or the whole kit an' bilin' o' their old Golden Circle, for that matter, than ter stick my head in at that air door."

Drawing a quick breath, Sammy threw open the drooping door and sprang across the threshold, at the same time flashing aloft a lantern which had been muffled under his army cloak. Yes, there was the ghost — the same strange, uncanny apparition of two years ago — the clinging grave clothes, the same glow of unearthly fire pointing out eyes, nose and mouth. It swayed in the dull light, and again Sammy's nostrils were assailed by the damp, escaping odor of mildew.

"This is child's play!" he cried, curtly. "Drop this silly masquerading! I will shoot you where you stand, else! You shall not get away this time!"

A low ripple of mocking laughter seemed to float through the dead air of the room as the white draperies floated through the dividing doorway as they had done that other time, and the door closed upon them. Again, upon trial, he found it locked. Strange, how history repeated itself. Two or three vigorous kicks were sufficient to bring the bolted door sagging free from broken hinges, and, in a moment, Sammy was in the further room, swinging his lantern into every nook and corner of the tenantless apartment. As before, the tiny-paned windows were fastened upon the inside. Notwithstanding his thorough examination of two years ago for any sign of a trap-door in ceiling, floor, or walls, he went conscientiously over the same grounds again.

He even tried to pry up some of the boards of the rough flooring, only to find them fast, with the dust of years filling up the cracks and rising in a choking cloud, stirred by his unavailing efforts. He next concentrated his attention upon the discolored wainscoting which met the rough plaster about three feet from the floor. There must be some hidden key to the situation here! He had never believed in ghosts, not really, but while before he had, in spite of his brave belief, grown cold and shaky in the presence of this baffling mystery, now — except for

the momentary trick of memory outside — all undefinable fear or shrinking from the thought of the supernatural was singularly wanting, and he prosecuted his search sanely, thoughtfully, determinedly. Finding nothing at all suggestive in the wainscoting, he returned nonplussed to the first room.

“Poor Zack,” he mused, half-humorously. “He never will get over his barbaric views on the ghost question now. And he’ll imagine that I am secretly convinced, when I had so hoped to convince him, let alone all other considerations. I won’t give up! I wonder — I wonder — there must be a way out — I wonder — Gee-whillikens! I never noticed that before!”

A small door just south of the one leading to the room beyond had caught his speculative glance — unnoticed before because the ghost had not returned to this room, and he had not attached much importance to it, confining his exertions to the mysterious one beyond whence the specter had gone — and yet was not.

Opening this smaller door quickly, he discovered a large closet nearly filled with sacks of grain stacked up against the inner wall. The blood flushed his face and receded as quickly, leaving him cold and trembling at the quick recoil of his senses from the sudden chilling question that leaped unasked to his brain.

“Was it wheat? Was it *that* wheat?”

Ah, memory, memory, memory! Was he never to forget? Only a moment, remembering a sunny, stubbled field, a whirring flock of black-birds, and a quiet form upon the ground, then, with a steady hand, but without much purpose, for the room beyond held the secret, he began pulling down the heavy sacks. During the process, he suddenly uncovered what seemed to be the top of a huge box. The effect of this find worked a marvelous transformation. His brain whirled with excitement, his hands plucked savagely at the sacks yet concealing the rest of the supposed box. And that is what it proved to be — a creepy-looking one at that, for it was not unlike the rough pine box around a coffin, only deeper. At a rough estimation, it seemed to be about three feet deep, three feet wide, and perhaps five or six feet long.

“At last!” was Sammy’s first thought, a great relief flooding his soul and dispersing the shadows that had plunged him into such a gloom of despondency when he had thought his quest had been in vain. He hardly knew what he expected to find; but that he had discovered the hiding-place of deviltry, he did not doubt for a moment. “And what an ingenious cuss!” he mused. “All nicely nailed in! Now, how do you suppose he got there? Well, we will just find out.”

With a dulled, rusty hatchet found upon the floor and partaking of the general look of disuse, decay, and deserted forlornness which characterized the cabin and its meager equipment, he began prying off the top of the box. Before the first nails were out, he heard something fall in the next room. Enlightenment entered his mind in a blinding flash. Snatching up the lantern, he sprang through the intervening doorway just in time to behold the ghost crawling through a large opening in the wainscoting. In the confusion of his unexpected and precipitate flight from the box, the ghost had doubtless let the door, the location of which had been so well concealed, fall with more force than he had anticipated, thus giving Sammy the clue to the whole tawdry mystery. Setting the lantern down quickly, he threw his arms around the hideous object as it slowly rose from the floor, pinioning it as in a vise. His first instinct was to call to Zack to come and search for concealed weapons while he himself held the ghost helpless in his arms; but he shook his head smiling dubiously as he glanced at the glowing, bluish lights seeming as if they would bore a hole right through him as he looked.

“No, not yet. Poor old Zack would lose his mind, I verily believe, upon sight of — that. And then this is not Hank — it is too small —

like the other time — and Hank may come. I need Zack out there.”

He cautiously felt around for a gun, but finding none, he began tearing away the ghostly wrappings. First of all came the gleaming mask.

“Susie!” gasped Sammy, in amazed incredulity. “Susie Halstead! You — you — of all people! Why, you were not brave enough! You were always a scared little thing! *Why* did you do it?”

“He — he’s my own uncle — I ’low I had ter help him,” came the answer, in a small, stifled, trembling voice, all her courage gone in a moment. She was shaking as with ague, and her pretty little face was as white as the grave trumpery she wore.

All of Sammy’s sternness vanished, for it hurt him to think of the sweet, blooming, childish face with its trustful gaze that yet sparkled with girlish coquetry at a moment’s notice, that he remembered so well in Zack’s sweetheart, brought to such straits as this — all under the baleful influence of that parasite upon the bounty of the earth which gave him room to which he was not entitled — Gerry Goodman’s murderer. He could not understand how it had come about. Timid, shrinking, affectionate, simple-hearted little Susie Halstead, idol of good, stanch, lovable, original, old Aunt Salina’s heart! There

could be no guile in Aunt Salina Haskin's sunny nature. It was as an open book. Her daughter, Serepta, Susie's mother, was a singularly good woman for her opportunities. Whence had come this strain of bad blood? From the Halsteads, of course. But, after all, did it show such bad blood on her part? She had said, "I 'low I had ter help him." He was her father's brother, and blood, the old saying goes, is ever thicker than water.

He forbore questioning her farther, for awhile, noting the panic of fear which gripped her as she stared in speechless terror at her captor. Instead, to give her a little time, he stooped and picked up the fore-arm and hand of a human skeleton and a white mask shining with phosphorous, shrugging his shoulders in derisive scorn that any should think to deceive him, Sammy Goodman, with such cheap mummery as this. The manner in which Susie's refuge, when cornered, was concealed, was clever, very clever indeed; but to play ghost on him — that was the weak spot in the armor of the malefactors, whoever they might be. It might do for Zack and — others, but not for him. And yet, it had been a right fearsome spectacle!

"You certainly were rigged up in a manner befitting old Satan himself," he said at last, admiringly. "You were enough to scare the wits

out of any one. The trouble with you, Susie," he continued, in a lower voice and very seriously, "was that you forgot that I do not believe in ghosts — and that if I did, I should not be afraid of my father's spirit."

At that moment, Zack came slipping into the room, his face alight with eager excitement.

"Hank's a-comin'!" he cried, in a hushed but vibrant whisper, then, catching sight of the big-eyed, trembling culprit who cowered against the wall as if to ward off recognition, he cried out in astonishment:

"Why, Susie! What on earth are you a-doin' here? An' what's the matter? You look so skeered — an' wild. You ain't a-feared o' me, air you? I ain't no hant — honest Injun!"

He was too startled to comprehend all at once the significance of her presence in conjunction with the heap of ghostly paraphernalia lying upon the floor.

"It is Susie who is the ghost," said Sammy, grimly. "Is Hank alone?"

"An' ter think I was a-feared o' Susie!" said Zack, in a low, dazed voice, staring at her as if he could not believe his senses. "But why —"

"Never mind why," interrupted Sammy, impatiently, extinguishing the lantern as he spoke. "We have n't time for explanations now. Where is Hank — and is he alone?"

"'Peared like he was comin' straight here," pondered Zack, coming back to the exigencies of the situation with difficulty, and still staring at Susie through the gloom. "I did n't see no one else but jist Hank. I 'low he 's right out there now less 'n he mistrusted —"

"Come to the other room," cried Sammy, hurriedly. "And stand on one side the door while I stand on the other. When he comes in, we 'll both of us nab him. If he saw the light — he would likely think it was Susie's. Do n't you dare to give any alarm, my girl! It would only be the worse for Hank, for then we 'd have to shoot."

After giving his directions in a low voice, he and Zack crept softly to the outer door. Zack had left it ajar, and the cool, spring, night air drifting in served to dissipate much of the nausea attendant upon Sammy's encounter with grave clothes and phosphorus — and how good it was to be waiting to deal with a man now — the man of all men! Susie had nonplussed him. He had not known what to do with Susie. She was such a slip of a girl — and Zack loved her — and Zack was, well, Zack was Zack. But he should know what to do with Hank!

A moment, and they heard footsteps approaching. They had an eerie sound, though the ghosts of the place had been laid forever. Both Sammy

and Zack thought of footsteps through fallen autumn leaves of a long ago night when Prince had treed a 'coon. As then, they came straight forward, but this time, they did not swerve. Hank must have deemed that all was well for he stepped into the dark doorway without hesitation. Instantly, the boys were upon him; but he was a desperate man, and it was very dark in the room. He tore himself free and leaped outside. They followed him so quickly that there was neither time for him to get to the timber nor to hide anywhere. He turned and began to shoot. A great rage welled up in Sammy's heart, remembering how he had done that once before. The second shot was followed by a piercing scream, and the boys turned to see Susie throw up her hands in the white moonlight and fall in a heap just outside the door.

"Go quick, Zack!" cried Sammy. "Quick, boy! Or she will die! I must follow Hank!"

"He'll be too much for you alone, Sammy," said Zack, in a dull, aching voice. He was standing stock still as if stunned. "I do n't dast ter leave you. Company E—"

"Would you let her die there — alone?" cried Sammy, fiercely. "Go, I say. Do you dare disobey orders?" Then he sprang after the indistinct form speeding toward the timber.

Sammy had always been fleet of foot and he

gained rapidly. By the time the coveted timber was reached, he was so close that it was once more impossible for Hank to turn aside and hide; for he could not hide sound, even if sight failed in the darker night of the forest. But Crooked Creek was just ahead and as Sammy's arm shot out to seize the fugitive, he stumbled and fell over a twisted, exposed root, and Hank slipped over the high bank. Sammy sprang to his feet, hurried to the bank, and peered down into the bed of the murmuring little stream; but Hank had disappeared. It was almost the exact spot where he had disappeared the night of the 'coon hunt. Disappointed, discouraged, sick at heart, he turned away at last, heaping mental epithets of scorn upon himself for not having fired at his enemy before he could reach the woods. But he had not wanted to kill, unless there was no other way, and he had thought there was another way. Now, he was helpless before the vastness and the blackness and the secrecy of the forest. He could only go back.

Suddenly, he stopped as if struck with an idea, proceeded again for some little distance, turned and walked about thirty yards up the creek. Next, he crept toward it on his hands and knees. When he came to the bank of the creek, he concealed himself carefully behind a bush overhanging the edge and gazed long and yearningly

down the stream shimmering here and there with patches of the late moonlight. Perhaps ten minutes passed away thus before his reward came, and already the increased chill of approaching dawn was in the air. There was a faint rustling of the brush a short distance down the creek bed, and presently he saw Hank creep cautiously out into the open at the opposite water's edge. The man stood perfectly still for a moment, listening, then began walking quietly up the stream. Doubtless, he had pursued the same tactics the night of the 'coon hunt of long ago. There was some secret cave somewhere in the vicinity, doubtless. With tense muscles, Sammy waited until Hank was opposite his own hiding place — then he bounded across the narrow creek.

All the bitterness and hatred against this man for all these long, long years, and the memory of the beloved father gone forever, with all the crying for him — in the night — of no avail because he never could come back, was nerving Sammy for the struggle. Hatred, love of life and liberty, fear of death, were causing Hank to fight with all the desperate strength there was in him. Back and forth they weaved across the shallow stream. Once, in the history of those who had pioneered upon its course, because it had overflowed its banks, it had inadvertently caused death. There was seeming that there was to be

another death struggle. But if Hank's was the greater hate — the one who wrongs is ever a better hater than the wronged — Sammy's was the greater love — love of justice and truth, and of the good man who had gone; and love is the stronger after all. Fighting for Sammy, too, was his cleaner life. Presently, Hank began to pant and his hold grew less firm; another while, and he fell to the ground. He reached for his revolver, but, before he could use it, Sammy wrenched it from him.

"I am going to turn you over to the authorities at once, Hank, for the murder of my father" said Sammy, coldly quiet now that his end was accomplished. The dream of years! At last! At last! "It all depends upon you whether I turn you over dead or alive. I will shoot you if you attempt to escape. Come — we will first return to your house."

"If I had only killed you — when you were in my power — back there in Missouri," said Hank, in the low, brooding tone of an exceeding bitterness of spirit.

"Which you would have done, I believe, if you had n't been frightened away first, or if we had been there when you returned," said Sammy, curtly.

Zack was sitting upon the ground with Susie's head on his lap. He had a pan of water and was

tenderly bathing a ragged looking wound in her right shoulder. Her face was white and pinched and infinitely pathetic in the pale moonlight. "I 'm a-feared she's pretty hard hit," said Zack, shaking his head mournfully.

"Does it hurt much?" asked Sammy, as he knelt down beside the girl. "Poor little Susie — and you were so brave — mistakenly so, of course — but oh, so brave, braver than Zack here who is a soldier, and yet he was afraid of a poor little woman mite like you," he rallied her, hoping to win a smile which should tell him that her hurt was not serious. What a low-down, cowardly, brutal trick in Hank to have used this sweet, simple, light-hearted granddaughter of old Aunt Salina so ruthlessly and selfishly for his own fiendish purposes! But, after all, it was like him. "Tell me, Susie, does it hurt much?"

"Not very," responded Susie, faintly. "It ain't very bad, Sammy, Zack 'lows I 'm purt nigh kilt, but I ain't."

"What's the matter with you, Susie?" inquired Hank, impatiently. "Did you git skeert o' yourself?"

"You shot me, Uncle Hank. You did n't mean to — no more 'n you meant ter shoot Mr. Goodman," said Susie, in a clear, steady, little voice, looking at no one but staring straight up into the shimmering star-shot sky overhead. It

was as if her nearness to the things unseen gave this little unlettered backwoods maiden to see some earthly things more clearly. "You git too mad Uncle Hank, and then that makes you do other things — like shootin' Sammy when he was only a little boy, and meanin' ter shoot him now — when you got me instid. A body ain't got no need ter git so mad." She sighed and turned her head wearily on Zack's knees. "I 'm sorry you 're took, Uncle Hank, but I 'low I ain't a-goin' ter play ghost for you no more."

The cocks were ushering in the dawn with loud voices when, leaving Hank bound and helpless within his own ill-fated house to await the coming of the sheriff, Sammy and Zack bore the now unconscious girl to the Goodman home and laid her gently on the company bed in the best room.

CHAPTER XIX

AN INTERLUDE

SAMMY'S leave of absence was so nearly expired as to make it imperative that the next day but one be the last which he dared spend at home. Zack came over early in the afternoon, presumably to relieve the tired nurses — Mrs. Halstead, bitterly resentful toward her husband's brother, the snapping-eyed, voluble old Aunt Salina, for once too angry to be helpful, Mrs. Goodman and Mollie — and, incidentally, to see for himself that his suffering little sweetheart was not pestered into a fever by maternal fault-finding or grandmaternal solicitation for more particulars, in that lady's insatiable lust for news. Oh, Zack was a famous nurse, as had been proved in Sammy's case, and he gently but firmly pushed them all out of the room, including Sammy, who solemnly winked, and closed the door softly upon them. In the new dignity of his worn uniform, that badge of deep experiences, and in their knowledge of his good report in his regiment and of how he had nursed Sammy, thereby saving his life, he commanded a new respect and a

strange faith in his efficiency which he never could have done in the old days — before the war, and they went, unprotestingly, unquestioningly. And yet all he said was “ You-all clear out an’ rest. I ’ll set by Susie a spell.”

He thought she was asleep — so still she was. The doctor had said she would get well; but how very white, and thin, and ill she looked. He sat down by the bedside to watch over her while she slept, his great, loving heart swelling with protective tenderness. It seemed as if all his old clumsiness had been refined away by hardship, so quiet and gentle were all his movements. But Susie was not asleep.

“ Will they hang Uncle Hank, Zack? ” came in a weak little voice from the depths of the feather pillow.

“ No such luck,” said Zack, gravely.

“ Why — Zack! ”

“ He killed the best man on this here earth, an’ — he nearly killed you. He deserves hangin’ — but he got cold feet — he knowed he would n’t stand any show if it come ter a trial — an’ the Court ’lowed him ter plead guilty yistiddy an’ sentenced him for a number o’ years. He ’d orter a-hung — if he *is* your uncle, Susie.”

“ I ’low you ’re orful mad at me, Zack. I ’ll — give your ring back — if you want me to,” the voice was very, very low, and she fingered the

cheap little gold-filled circlet flutteringly. "I 'low you would n't keer ter keep stiddy company with a hant."

"I always did abominate hants," replied Zack, soberly. "But the doctor said you was a-goin' ter git well right soon an' so there ain't no danger o' yer bein' a hant yit awhile, thank God! Play-likin' do n't count with me. I never was a-feared o' flesh an' blood. You can ask Sammy about that."

"Why, Zack," the pale, pinched face was suffused with a glow that was almost pink, and her eyes danced like stars, "do you mean—why, you 're a soger, an' a soger could marry *anybody*—do you mean—you do n't mean you 're goin' ter stick by me after what I done?"

"I mean that I 'm a-goin' ter marry you jist as soon as ever this here war is over," said Zack, with great simplicity. "An' now you have talked a passel an' I 'low you 'd better quit awhile an' rest, or you 'll git a fever."

There was quiet for awhile—a long while. Her eyes were closed. One of his big hands lay quiescent upon his knee, the other upon the exquisitely hand-woven blue counterpane of the company bed, the kind of a counterpane that makes heirlooms. He was dreaming of that day when the war should be over. Presently, a thin, white, oh, a very white hand reached out and was

laid flutteringly upon the big brown one on the counterpane.

"Zack," it was only a whisper, "Bob — he always sided with Uncle Hank, an' he jined the Knights of the Golden Circle 'cause Uncle Hank was the leader — but Gran'ma an' mam an' me — we're Union. I never helped the Knights, honest, Zack, I never did. They never were there at Uncle Hank's old house. It was jist Uncle Hank — 'cause he wanted ter come home. It's so lonesome without a home."

After his summary dismissal, Sammy left the house and wandered rather aimlessly about the premises. The girls were out in the garden, making the most of these fair, April, planting days, Mollie digging the hills while Ama Jane dropped the potatoes. They might not even make holiday on this last day of all, for farming is slow work for women and girls and means long hours and many, many of them. He might go and help. He would be royally welcomed, he knew, and more for his companionship than his labor, too, but — he did n't just feel like it, somehow. He had so many things to think about; only, somehow, he always found himself rather dreaming than thinking. It was the last day. He did not feel much like talking, even to the girls. The regiment was calling him strongly. He was glad to go — and yet — it was the last

day. It was better understood now what General Grant's long, toilsome, tedious, silent winter of canalling and bayou-navigating meant. He had only been biding his time. And when that military giant, who knew so well when not to speak as well as when to speak, his plans fully matured, really decided to move upon Vicksburg, it would be no child's play. Many, oh, many, many would not come back. It was altogether within the probabilities that he should never see the sun on Mollie's dusky brown hair again, as she stooped to her task, scorning sunbonnets, nor see Ama Jane straighten her tired little back after each throw, with a quaint little gesture of utter distaste which spoke more plainly than words could have done that, when she grew up, she was going to have servants to do her work, while she just read and read and wore beautiful clothes and went everywhere.

So he smiled a little sadly as he turned away. And then, without definitely willing it so, he found himself after a while in the woods back of the old schoolhouse, and, with a whimsical sigh of remembrance, wandered down to the creek and sat down upon a stump. Could it be the same — verily, it was the very same stump upon which he sat after his fight with Bob Halstead when he had been worsted by treachery, and here it was that little Mary Ann Hamilton had come to him

and comforted him. Dear little Mary Ann! She had been a true-hearted child-sweetheart, and a valiant. How they all came trooping back to him, memories of that day, as he sat staring dreamily at the very place in the creek where he had washed his face so that she might see that it was not all hurts — mostly just blood and dirt and sweat. It all seemed but yesterday; and yet — how much had happened since then. Now, in very truth, was “pap’s” honor vindicated. He need fight for it no more. And yet — it could not bring his father back. Was it worth while? Was anything worth while except peace, and home, and love, and the sun in Mollie’s hair? Yes, a thousand times, yes, but the place brought it all back so poignantly, the loss, the bitterness of the loss he had felt that day, which all his fighting of Bob, and all his taking of Hank at last, could not lighten. There is no compensation for a loss like that. Perhaps, in this world, no justice to balance the taking of life. In the world beyond — Ah, well, it all happened long ago, though it did seem but yesterday! Angry bitterness toward Bob for his base insinuations against Gerry Goodman, and resentment against his treacherous attack with a bat were changed to contemptuous indifference. It was a happier feeling if not a holier. All his passionate protest against the injustice of Hank’s being at

large while his father had to go was exorcised at last by the consummation of his fierce desire. The physical suffering which he had endured — war made him laugh at boyish bruises. While the one bright spot in the memories of that day, Mary Ann Hamilton and her sweet, shy sympathy, he dwelt upon with smiling tenderness and knew that he would cherish it forever.

A light footstep behind him. Could it be Mary Ann? He was still under the spell of memory and at that moment it seemed the most natural thing in the world that little Mary Ann should come tripping up behind him as she had that winter's day in the long ago which now seemed but yesterday. He sat perfectly still, fearing to dispel the illusion. Two soft, cool hands were placed over his eyes.

"Mary Ann," he said, aloud.

"Wrong. Guess again," a soft voice whispered.

"I give up!" and Sammy reached up to take hold of the hands to remove them, but, of their own accord, they were hastily withdrawn. He turned quickly.

"Sara Brown!" he cried, springing to his feet, all at once the light of the world in his eager eyes.

"Right!" was the laughing reply. "You are an excellent guesser — when you can see. How

disappointing, after all one's dreams, to wake up and find — just prosaic, old me, army nurse and whilom tyrant, in the place of — Mary Ann, sweetheart. I'm awfully sorry I intruded. Father and I were passing and I saw you come here — but I rather thought you would say, 'The scout's wife.' You used to think everybody was she, you remember."

"I would rather it was you than any other person on earth," replied Sammy, earnestly, holding her hands, which had so cleverly tricked him, in a close, firm grasp. "And I think you know it. There has never been anyone but you. I have loved you since the day I found you — in the cellar. I wanted to tell you at Helena, but you sent for Herbert and went away. You have always been a mystery. You are here — you are there — like the genii. You come like the sun in the morning but you flit away again like a thief in the night. But I know you now. You are destiny — and I shall not let you go again."

"Oh," she said, her breath coming a little quickly, but smiling mischievously still, "but Mary Ann — you were expecting her — waiting for her — to keep tryst here — at some old remembered meeting place —"

"Mary Ann is a child — a memory," he explained, simply. "I was thinking about a day when we were boy and girl at school, here in the

woods by Crooked Creek, and she was good to me, when you came slipping up behind me. I thought I was a boy again. There never has been any one but you. How or why you are here, you can tell me later—if you want to. Now, I only want your promise. Will you marry me when I come back, Sara Brown?"

How still it was there on the banks of the fateful little stream. It alone rippled and murmured and babbled ceaselessly, for it talked of the mysteries, which are without end. She had tried to free her hands, but he was too strong for her and too determined. If she were a dryad of the wood, ready to scamper away into invisibility by way of some giant tree trunk, at least the miracle should be performed before his very eyes, out of his very hands. She was bare-headed, her poke-bonnet with its delicious pink rosebuds swinging over her arms, and was clad in a soft, dainty spring gown, so altogether unlike her severely plain garb of their other meetings that it was little wonder he likened her to a wood-nymph. She seemed the very spirit of April—of the spring. Her brown eyes were wistful, down-cast. There was a breathlessness in the waiting—even as there was a breathlessness in the forest. The sun had disappeared behind a bank of clouds in the west which had been steadily creeping up till it was now almost overhead, and all

the forest awaited in still awe the coming of the April rain. It had been a warm day. The storm would be a heavy one. But neither of the young people there by the dimpling stream was thinking of the approaching thunder shower at all. They were both a little pale.

"Father is waiting for me — yonder," she said, at last, in a low voice, not yet daring to meet his eyes which were fixed so steadfastly upon the drooping head. "I saw you come here, as I said, and I followed you — to surprise you. I knew you would be surprised to see me in Indiana. But I must be going now, father is waiting."

She looked up suddenly, looked him straight and full in the eyes, in her own, the old baffling look of the ages of womankind. Were they smiling — were they weeping — were they challenging — were they mocking — were they kind or cruel — were they sad or glad or mad? Heaven alone knew — not Sammy Goodman. A moment she dazzled him thus, a hesitating, palpitating, questioning moment, then she said, quietly:

"Good-by, Captain Goodman. Don't get killed if you can help it. You are such a rampant forgetter — in a battle."

"You have not answered my question," he persisted, steadily.

"Why, the storm is almost here," she cried out, suddenly, as the thunder at that moment began

rolling and muttering over the tree-tops. There was a strange twilight in the forest. "I must run — good-by!"

But he held her.

"Come to the house," he cried, quickly. "When the storm is over, you may go wherever you were going. Quick now, before we run for it — will you marry me, Sara Brown?"

"Sara Brown will never marry you," she made answer, quite calmly, though her hands were trembling. "Sometime, perhaps, you will know why. Not now. Good by, and remember, oh, *remember*, Captain, that I will be praying every day and every night that you may come back to us."

He was so dazed, so hurt, so bitterly disappointed, that he let her go. There seemed nothing else to do. The end of the world was come. He stood where she had left him a long, long time, with bent head and unseeing eyes. The first rain-drops were pattering on the new leaves of the forest when at last he turned to leave the little woodland scene and walked slowly homeward.

CHAPTER XX

“ WHERE THE SWEET MAGNOLIA BLOSSOMS GREW
AS WHITE AS SNOW ”

SAMMY rejoined the regiment at Milliken's Bend just before the batteries at Vicksburg were run, fifteen miles of them, without loss of life; all honor to the fearless, indomitable-souled Admiral Porter for it. The lack of casualties was the more remarkable in that the blockade was run, of necessity, because of the Confederate anticipatory activity, by the brilliant light of huge bonfires on the east side of the river and of burning houses opposite the city on the Louisiana side. The hazardous but momentous undertaking, splendidly conceived, was splendidly executed, and the spectacle of it was weird, magnificent, awful.

Admiral Porter with his eight gunboats finding Grand Gulf as impossible of taking by a front attack as Vicksburg on account of its location on a lofty bluff with the river laving its very feet, ran also these batteries, the night of the twenty-ninth of April. The Thirteenth Army Corps, Major-General McClernand com-

manding, of which the Eighteenth Indiana was a part, now in General Carr's Division, was marching under cover of the night across the point of land on the west side extending toward Grand Gulf — the top of a levee making it possible for the troops to move over an otherwise wholly impracticable stretch of low wet land — to meet the gunboat fleet and the transports under its escort, when Zack returned to the regiment. Its roster and ranks were then as full as they had been since Pea Ridge.

On the morning of the thirtieth of April, 1863, the Eighteenth Indiana and other portions of the Thirteenth Army Corps were landed by transports at Bruinsburg, on the rebel side of the river at last, and, during the day, the balance of the Corps and one Division of the Seventeenth Army Corps, Major-General McPherson commanding, was landed. Grant was at last, after months of yearning and of waiting, in the enemy's country, but with a “ vast river and the stronghold of Vicksburg ” between him and his base of supplies — and he had twenty thousand men with whom to begin this gigantic campaign as opposed to sixty thousand, strongly garrisoned at Grand Gulf, Haines' Bluff, and Jackson. There must have been with him a lonesome feeling whether he was conscious of it or not; and many a boy, putting foot upon this hostile and

menacing shore, turned and gazed yearningly back upon the transport he had just left and upon the safe, happy, but far away, receding Louisiana line, bidding a mute farewell before being swallowed up in the country of his foe.

Grand Gulf, to be used as a first base, was the first objective point. As fast as the troops debarked and were supplied with two-days' rations, they were pushed rapidly toward the high ground two miles inland. In order to intercept them and prevent their taking and occupying Grand Gulf, as was confidently expected would be attempted, the Confederate garrison at that point would find it necessary to proceed by way of Port Gibson, twelve miles in the interior, where was the first bridge spanning Bayou Pierre, a navigable stream, and, as were all streams in the Mississippi Valley that winter and spring, swollen with flood water.

That same evening, the Thirteenth Corps, having arrived at the bluff's just short of sundown, McClernand pushed forward on the Port Gibson road. The country in that part of Mississippi does in very truth "stand on edge." The hills are high and steep, for the most part heavily timbered, and the ravines are correspondingly deep, very deep indeed for battle grounds, and rendered well-nigh impenetrable by masses of vine and canebrake. The roads run along the

ridges and follow the curves. The Thirteenth Corps sometimes found these curves so sharp that the head and rear of a column would be so close together that the men could have conversed one with the other, had it been permitted. But it was not permitted. The enemy was somewhere in the neighborhood. Of that, there could be no doubt. All orders were given in whispers. It was a silent, ghostly march. Men trod softly. Occasionally, the hoot of an owl could be heard, a lonesome sound at best, and many an impressionable boy shivered — he knew not why.

Company E of the Eighteenth Indiana was well up toward the head of the column, Benton's Brigade, to which it belonged, leading the night march. Across a deep, dark ravine on the other side of a big curve, the rear of the Eighteenth was moving forward silently, plainly discernible in the brilliant moonlight of the Southern night, while on this side, Zack and his fellows also pushing as quietly and doggedly ahead, could have hailed their comrades across the chasm had they dared.

“Makes me feel creepy,” complained Zack, in an awed whisper to Sammy marching close by at the side of the company. “’T would n’t s’prise me none ter see hants flittin’ ’mongst the cane down yander.”

“But it would n’t be Susie this time, Zack,”

replied Sammy, with humorous gravity, "so don't strain your eyes ravine-gazing. You'll need them when hell-fire for sure comes shooting out of those black abysses or somewhere round about out of secret places. Rebel guns are the only ghost lights I dread."

Hardly had he ceased speaking, when a heavy volley of musketry flashed in the very faces of the moving men. The vanguard of the Thirteenth Corps — marching swiftly and stealthily forward in the faint hope of being first at the coveted bridge and so preserving it for the safer and more expeditious crossing of the army — had, without warning, run straight up against the waiting Confederate defence at Thompson's Plantation about five miles west of Port Gibson. But the weird night march, the lonesome hooting of the owls, seeming to bear prophetic messages in their strange cries, the knowledge that their military seer confidently expected to be attacked somewhere on the road to Grand Gulf, saved the men from too great a surprise. The army as a whole never wavered, and individuals here and there who involuntarily swayed back from the sudden hot blast hurled in their faces quickly recovered when the order to advance was given.

The rebels fell back across a ravine to the left of the road and reaching high ground on the far side opened fire with a battery. The flashes of

the guns and the bursting shells lit up the night. It was another Witches' Revel on the Brocken — a most magnificent display of fireworks had not death stalked in the glare and lurked in the shadows. Pressing forward through the ravine, Company E got into position in a lane road leading up the hill. This road was so deeply worn and corrugated by usage and by tumultuous rains that it afforded a fair measure of protection to the men lying flat on their stomachs.

“ Gosh! I 'm glad I ain't as fat as I used ter be 'fore the war,” Zack whispered across to Percy as he stretched his length along one of the natural trenches. “ Used ter make me fightin' mad ter be a-gittin' so thin 'count o' bein' so hungry an' wored out all the time; but I 'low sichy state o' affairs has its good pints, too. Sammy always used ter say there was compensations for everything. That air's a fool doctrine most all the time. The exception 's jist when you 're a-lyin' in a shaller ditch an' have the satisfaction o' knowin' you ain't a-stickin' up behind.”

The enemy finally fell back still farther and the Union troops climbed into the vacated rebel position on the hill-top and waited for daylight. They lay in close column by divisions. There was desultory firing during the rest of the night but no real engagement.

At eight o'clock in the morning, the right wing

of the army, consisting of Carr's and Hovey's Divisions, advanced in column toward the new rebel position, under protection of a deep ravine to the right of the split road, Osterhaus's Division taking the left branch, Smith's being held in reserve. The ravine was an almost impenetrable mass of canebrake and the men floundered through the hot and steamy labyrinth as best they might, subjected all the while to the enemy's fire.

Perhaps four hundred yards from the rebel line, they came to the head of the ravine, where stood a small country church on a ridge sloping gently to the south and east to the edge of an oval-shaped pasture green with springing grass. If the planter whose domain this was were perchance watching as the men of Carr's and Hovey's fighting divisions came bursting out of the canebrake, it must have seemed to him as if they were swarming up from the bowels of the earth after having discovered some hitherto unsuspected subterranean passage-way leading under fortified Vicksburg — that mistaken hope of Jefferson Davis. With this fair oval field, the ground rose again, and some sixty yards beyond was the rebel line, bristling with the guns of the entire Grand Gulf garrison under General Bowen, doggedly defending, at an infinite advantage in a chosen position in a rugged country, where all nature, the nature of the Southland,

avored the defender of its mistaken ideals. Just behind the little white meeting house with its silent, pitying, poignant, steadfast but seemingly powerless appeal for peace, the Union army formed its line of battle and moved forward. The church split the Eighteenth Indiana almost exactly at the center forcing Company E out of the timber through which it was marching and into the main road to Port Gibson.

Suddenly Sammy experienced a constriction of the heart accompanied by a momentary paralysis of consternation. Reason enough there was for his terror. Directly in front of Company E, less than four hundred yards away, squarely set in the road so that the blanched faces of his men must gaze straight into their frowning muzzles, stood two field guns. His company, his comrades, his friends, tried and true, would be mowed down like grass before the blade! They stood no more chance than sheep led to the slaughterer, when that battery should belch up death to all in its path. And that might be the next instant, and then, oh, the white and staring faces quiet in the road! It should not be, Omnipotent God, who gives to some the desire divine enough and quick enough to save! Up above his head flashed his sword, out rang his voice clear as a bugle call, sweet with the inspiration that had answered his need.

“ Company E, close up on the right! ”

The men hesitated, slow to grasp the meaning of the order under the circumstances, as the general order had been to advance.

In an agony of apprehension, Sammy rushed to the front of the company, shouting his repeated order in a voice that thrilled with poignant appeal.

“ For God’s sake, close on the right! ”

None too soon, the company, perceiving its dire extremity, lunged to the right, entering the timber and connecting with the right wing south of the church. The companies to the left immediately followed the movement, closing to the right, and bringing Company B into the roadway — to martyrdom — at the very moment that the two-gun battery opened fire, its grape and canister strewing the country road with at least two-thirds of the smiling boys of that hapless company. Oh, inscrutable God, at Whose humanly unreadable decree, those passed on from the place of death, and these passed in!

Benton’s Brigade now charged through a magnolia grove which was in full bloom. This grove was directly in the pathway of the frontal resistance and had been so riddled by bullets that the sweet, fragrant southern blossoms covered the ground like new-fallen snow, and the men literally moved over a soft, white carpet of flow-

ers — those, indeed, who did not sink down upon it to stain its purity with the crimson of ebbing life-blood — while softly, softly, like snowflakes still falling, new petals came drifting down. The two-gun battery was supported by a brigade of infantry and their firing was deadly. Many who had escaped death at that first discharge of the guns, by virtue of young Captain Goodman's fortunate order — fortunate for the boys of Company E if not for the boys of Company B — met it now in the magnolia grove, with this only difference that they had for their winding sheet sweet white flowers instead of the dust of the road. Smoke curled through the trees and hid, mercifully, much of the havoc wrought; but it was a deadly charge, so deadly that when the reckoning came twenty-five per cent of the Eighteenth were silent when their names were called.

“Zack! Zack! Come back! We can't stand this!” screamed Percy in the thick of it. “My God, think of Company B!”

A few swift steps and Zack was in front of him.

“Now you turn your face t' other way an' keep a-movin' or I 'll run you through,” he cried, grimly. “I 've 'bout give you up — you 're the durndest coward in the army — there ain't ary mite o' hope for you. Next time you 'tempt ter

straggle, I 'low I 'll let you go an' be shot for a deserter or spend your ornery life in hidin' an' cringing' an' cussin' an' wishin' you had been. I 'm through. Next time 'll be the last time. I mean it!" His words came in exploded gasps with his running.

Emerging from the magnolia grove, the troops found themselves at the edge of the oval field only sixty yards from the rebel line. This field was somewhat higher in the center than at either side, and, by pursuing wary tactics, the men were able to protect themselves to some extent from the fury of the fusillade flung out to meet them. They would lie down to load, then crawl up the slope, fire, and fall back. Sammy, walking up and down the line, presently perceived that Zack would load, slip up to the top of the incline, and shoot, all in such an ecstasy of wild excitement that the crack shot of Cracker's Neck might just as well have been firing blank cartridges into the air for all the effect his commendable activity was having behind the rail fence where the rebels were lying.

"Come, come, Zack," he said, dryly, "quit shooting at the moon and shoot at the Johnnies for awhile—just to vary the monotony. Besides, they need it. The moon does n't. He's supposed to be neutral—and you are breaking the laws of neutrality by your madness."

“It’s a sight better to shoot at the moon than that-air fence, I ’low. Some sport to that,” Zack muttered, coming to himself with shame-faced resentfulness.

“Nevertheless, the fence is the prescribed target in this game, and I prefer that you stick to it. You are too good a shot to be wasting ammunition in the air.”

“There are a right smart better shots in the company than me, Sammy,” replied Zack, modestly, “but I kin hit that air fence without battin’ a eye, and if you’re so dead sot on it for a target, why, you’re the Captain, an’ here goes. *Or revoir, Mr. Moon!*”

For full three hours the two forces kept popping away at each other across the field. Once some troops to the left of the Eighteenth made a gallant but rash charge, and, as they were falling back, the jubilant rebels raised a mighty yell. It was the old, well-worn, well-known yell of the southern armies, but with a distinguishing twang to it, somehow. Zack, firing vengefully away at the fence, doing what he could to make it pay for the repulse, recognized the “way down South” French “burr” of the Louisiana Tigers who had disputed the Eighteenth’s determination to regain the Peoria Battery at Pea Ridge. With the recognition came an odd feeling of familiarity and old acquaintance, followed closely by the

fierce desire to do again what had been done to this proud brigade once before. "Pea Ridge! Pea Ridge!" he yelled defiantly, sarcastically, and repeated the derisive epithet until his voice died away in hoarse gutturals.

Reinforcements were sent for repeatedly. But Osterhaus on the left branch of the road was also hard pressed and his need was more urgent than McClernand's who was with his right wing and all available troops in reserve were sent to Osterhaus's relief. Finally, however, McGinnis's Brigade of Hovey's Division could be seen passing the church, following the route pursued by Benton's Brigade a few hours earlier.

At the sight of the men in blue marching confidently, cheerily, to the aid of Benton's weary, weary boys, hard-pressed and engaged in strenuous action since early morning, an electrical thrill swept over Sammy. And, curiously enough, while a sudden daring determination surged through his brain, a dreamy thought of bewitching Sara Brown drifted along the undercurrent of his thoughts, and, as have all soldier lovers since the world began, he wondered if she would be sorry if he never came back from this thing which he was going to do. And would she be proud of him as little Mary Ann had been in the old days? Oh, no, no, or else why, why, had she left him? Looking upon her now

in memory's clarified vision, as she stood beneath the storm-menaced forest, he thought there were tears in those true eyes.

“Come on, boys!” he shouted, carried away by the appeal of his daring conception and by the inspiration of the blue reinforcements. “Let's get that infernal machine of a battery and avenge Company B!”

In an instant, his company was on its feet and charging across the field, a wild light in its eyes.

“Halt!” commanded the Colonel.

“Charge!” shouted Sammy. Rank insubordination, but the end, if attained, justified the means — with some commanders, and Colonel Washburn was remembering Sammy at Pea Ridge.

Captain Charles of H Company now sprang forward.

“Come on, Company H!” he cried, ringingly. “We'll be in on this!”

He was followed by his entire command and a part of K Company and a few scattered ones from other companies, and this fraction of the old Eighteenth made that mad charge in the face of a deadly fire from the battery and supporting infantry. Although it seemed a thing impossible that any should reach the battery alive, there was no halting, no faltering. Sammy and Captain Charles were running ahead and the

men did not hesitate to follow such dauntless leaders. When within a short distance of the battery, the enemy fled in confusion. Sammy and Captain Charles arrived at the guns at the same time, Sammy placing his hand on one of the potentially deadly but now only sullen twin pieces, while Captain Charles jumped astride the other.

A few moments later, the reinforcements from Hovey's Division came up. Had it not been for their appearance on the way to support Benton, it is very probable that the battery would never have been thus surrendered to a mere handful of the fighting Eighteenth, but, nevertheless, the participants felt pardonable pride in achieving the enviable distinction of being first in, and no one could deny that the charge across the gun-swept field was a right gallant one. Some prisoners captured from the Louisiana troops said they knew who was coming because they recognized the Colonel's voice. If they had also heard and understood Zack's taunting cry, they remained disdainfully silent on the subject.

With the falling back of the enemy in McClermand's front, the fighting ceased in this part of the field. There was still some fighting to the left but soon the rebel forces here, too, fell back, and with the coming of dusk, the strange quiet of after-battle had descended upon Bayou Pierre,

upon the ridges and the canebrake, upon the unheeded beckoning of the little church, upon some rags of flowers, sweet-scented and white in the morning, stained, beaten down, crushed — dust from which they sprang — at eventide, upon the bivouacked Federal army.

Very early in the morning, Grant's advance army, unrepulsed in its initial step into the enemy's country, marched into Port Gibson.

CHAPTER XXI

“FIRST KETCH YOUR RABBIT”

FOLLOWING the battle of Port Gibson, Grant threw his army between Pemberton at Vicksburg and Johnson at Jackson. He then marched to Jackson, drove Johnson from that city and then turned toward Vicksburg. On May 16th was fought the sanguinary battle of Champion's Hill, Pemberton having decided to check the advance of Grant, and, if possible, force him to recross the Mississippi. He was defeated and driven back to the intrenchments at Black River Bridge. The next day he was driven out of that position and forced back to the fortifications around Vicksburg. By the evening of the 18th of May, the investment of that city by the Union Troops was complete. McClernand's Corps took its position somewhat south of the city, McPherson's being east and Sherman's north. The Confederate defences were very strong. They consisted of a string of redoubts or earthen forts scattered along the line at intervals averaging a distance between of possibly a quarter of a mile, beginning at Haines' Bluff on

the north and continuing in a circle around to the river below, making the line about seven miles long. These redoubts were connected by rifle pits with deep ditches in front.

On the twenty-first, General Grant decided to make a general assault the following day. Orders were sent to the different division and brigade headquarters to be prepared for this assault by ten o'clock on the morning of the twenty-second — a day heroic and terrible.

Benton's Brigade was located in a ravine running nearly parallel with the rebel works and about three hundred and fifty yards removed. From the summit of the hill, the ground descended slightly in the direction of the defences for about half the distance and then there was a gradual ascent. At the bottom of the depression was some scattered brush — otherwise, the ground was clear.

A few minutes before ten o'clock on the twenty-second of May, the troops were in position and the long line was ready to advance. It was an impressive moment; one never to be forgotten by the men waiting for the sound of the signal gun. Forty thousand men were about to charge well fortified works defended by thirty thousand men. Forty thousand men were about to go down into the valley — the valley of the shadow of death. It was a brave number. Who

of the forty thousand would see Vicksburg that day, or live to see it all in good time if not that day? Who of the forty thousand would pierce the shadow and find — the reality? Who would be the ones to fight on — who, to rest?

“That air’ll seem like a right smart distance across before we git over it,” Zack drawled, as he and Selvin were standing in line waiting for the signal.

“Shot in the back — shot in the back,” murmured Selvin, musingly. “Is that to be my fate at last? It shimmers so and it is so far — so very far — and so full of ‘hants,’ Zack, not sheeted ones like yours, but ghosts of fear, the fear of being hurt, the fear of being afraid, and, most of all, the fear of not being able to stand being afraid — the fear of panic.”

“Now, you jist perk up, Percy Selvin. Jist forgit everything but that you’re a-takin’ part in the biggest thing o’ this here whole war. This ’ll end it for sure — an’ jist think how uppy you’ll feel tellin’ your friends an’ posterity in years ter come how you was in the charge at Vicksburg when thirty thousand men was took prisoners along with seven miles o’ fortifications.”

“If I am, you won’t tell my mother, or the Captain, or Miss Brown, will you, Zack?” continued Selvin, still thoughtfully, his eyes on the

sinister, bristling, but apparently unmanned ramparts sealing that fair, southern city.

“ Are what? ” asked Zack, bluntly.

“ Shot in the back.”

“ Quick — git that-air fool notion out o’ your head once an’ for all. You’ll have ter turn a right smart more lively than I ’low you kin if you git ary chance ter git your back headed ter the enemy before I square you around ag’in.”

“ But you said, you know, back there in the magnolia grove, that there would n’t be another time,” said Selvin, a glint of humor in the sombre brown eyes. “ This time, I am to be left to my just deserts — to suffer the penalty, whatever it is to be. That is what you said, you remember.”

“ Well, seein’ s how it’s you — an’ you an’ me’ve tramped it tergether for a right smart while — an’ ’lowin’ I’d be purty lonesome pluggin’ along alone without you ter harangue — I’m willin’ ter stretch it a p’int an make it jist *one more time*,” said Zack, with great gravity.

And then, from the center of the line, came the roar of the signal gun.

“ Company E,” shouted Sammy, “ let’s be the first company over the works! Charge!”

The long line moved forward. Men swarmed like bees from the numerous ravines where they had been sheltered. As Benton’s Brigade broke over the hill and started down the incline, it was

greeted with such a roaring of cannon and rattle of musketry as no one in that long line had ever heard before. All other battle experiences paled before it. And down, down, down over the valley settled the rolling smoke — like a pall — and down, down, down into the valley went the first of the forty thousand — to be wrapped in that pall. There was no faltering. The bottom of the depression reached and the opposite slope beginning to be climbed by those still fighting on, the firing was more deadly still, and men began falling by the hundreds.

“Come on!” Zack yelled in Percy’s ear. “We’re over half way an’ ain’t dead yet!”

They were not, but others were, and more falling all the time. Zack’s battle madness, however, was so inspiring that Selvin was doing very well indeed, and was stumbling bravely up the rugged way when a comrade running on the other side of him was disemboweled, suddenly, as he ran. Selvin cowered to the ground and lay flat upon it.

“Git up, or I’ll kick the life out o’ you!” roared Zack, starting in as if to carry his threat into instant execution. He kicked the prostrate man unmercifully and called him all the names he could bring to mind in the stress of the moment, and they were rather many. When memory failed him, he repeated. To a looker-on he

might seem the stern task master, resentfully chastising a delinquent for bitter failure. The truth was that he loved this faulty boy — if it is a fault to shrink from the sight of red, arterial blood being pumped out so lavishly, at such awful waste, to water the ground for the growing of peace — as the roughly chiseled but great-hearted so often love the fine, frail things of earth.

At last Selvin staggered to his feet and stumbled on. Through his numbed and cowering senses, through his bewildered mind and shrinking soul, there flashed a saving impulse of humor. “ Now, I wonder if *this* will be the last time? Zack forgot to say,” ran the thought.

Coming to the ditches in front of a redoubt, they found that they were some eight feet wide and ten or twelve feet deep. A portion of the Eighteenth, carried forward by the impulse of the movement, was precipitated into these ditches. Being unable to cross them, the Federal forces lay down upon the ground and began a steady fire against the Confederate line of defences. They made it so dangerous for a rebel to show his head above the breastworks that there was little return fire from the enemy. They were in a comparatively safe position as they were, but enormous loss must inevitably follow a retreat — back across the smoking, mottled, moaning slopes. And thus it was determined

that they should hold their position until they might retire in safety under cover of darkness. Presently, it was discovered that some guns in a fort to the right of the position occupied by the Eighteenth Indiana had an enfilading fire down the line and men were dropping in its pathway almost as grain before the reaper.

"Captain Goodman," cried Colonel Washburn, "take your company and move back to the ravine — then move to the right and find a position where you can sharp-shoot those gunners!" Then, as Sammy turned immediately to obey this somewhat startling command, the Colonel added, laconically, without the shadow of a smile, although the gravity of his countenance underwent subtle, momentary lightening as if he might be laughing inside of him, "And, mind you, Captain, *do n't* charge them!" And that was all Colonel Washburn ever said to Sammy Goodman showing that he remembered the insubordination of two mad captains and a handful of mad followers back there "Where the Sweet Magnolia Blossoms Grew."

Sammy's face flushed, but he did not dare to smile back. He saluted gravely and respectfully and proceeded to execute his commission, thinking the while with a very real throb of grateful affection of the Colonel's words in that blistering cornfield on the weary, weary march to

Helena. With Union soldiers strung all along in front to keep the enemy down, it was thought that the company might move back without calling down the rebel fire upon them to any very damaging extent; but, after Sammy and his men had passed the bottom of the depression and had begun to climb the opposite slope, it was not necessary for the Confederates to expose themselves very much to the foe immediately before them in order to get a line upon the hastening figures on the far hillside bound on an errand boding no good to the besieged, and, almost instantaneously, the fire of the whole rebel line anywhere within range was turned upon the little bunch of blue-coats pluckily daring all for the glorious chance of silencing those enfiling guns. Now and again, one of the boys would fall. Had the distance been less, it is very probable that not one would have escaped.

When almost within the safety zone, Selvin perceived all at once that Zack was not running by his side. Zack! Why, where was Zack? He passed his hand over his eyes, momentarily confused in his reasoning, for Zack had always been there. What could have happened to keep Zack away? He did not know what to do without Zack. Why, who would write that letter to his mother—that mother so thoroughly grounded in “ book l’arnin’ ” that this same Zack had been

awed by the mere thought of addressing her on paper with his crude, hieroglyphic-like penmanship and his cruder orthographic blunders? Who would kick and abuse him into line the next time? Was there then to be no "next time" after all? Zack had forgotten to say it back there — back there — the wandering thought reminded him to glance "back there."

"Why, Zack!" he cried aloud, with a sobbing breath. It was not so very far back that Zack lay — perhaps fifty yards — but it was in the hell zone of fire — of shot and of shell — and the kindly, stalwart backwoodsman lay very low beneath it, the pitiless rain of it still pelting his quiet form.

Had any one been watching Selvin at that moment, that one might have seen a strange little smile hovering over the boyish lips, as if it were saying, "Kismet," as if he had foreseen all the while something not yet come to pass — but coming. Oddly enough, too, all fear fell from him, at least the shrinking or consciousness of fear. One thought stood out distinctly, the thought that the helpless figure of his friend out there must be carried in out of the storm. Thus it was that simply, unquestioningly, unflinchingly, young Percy Selvin, whom Zack had befriended at all times, through good and evil report, turned and started back down the reek-

ing, shell-swept slope. The firing seemed to be even more terrible than before, due, no doubt, to the fact that the enemy, perceiving that the Yankees were on the point of vanishing over the hill, redoubled its efforts.

“Come back!” cried a comrade, suddenly realizing what Selvin had it in mind to do. “Come back, idiot! Do n’t you know you’d be a dead man before you got half-way to him? Likely, he ’s dead, anyhow.”

If Selvin heard, he did not heed, but kept steadily on. Likewise oblivious was he to the incessant crack, crack, crack of rifle and musket, the very next one of which might mean death on the wing for him. He seemed — indeed, he thought himself to be — singularly calm and rational in this unexpected crisis. In reality, he was living the fateful moments in those upper strata of utter self-abnegation to which human nature so rarely attains that, from the human view-point, his mind was soaring in a very ecstasy of unreality.

He was so much slighter than Zack that the burden was almost too much for the fitting of the back to it; but he gathered the unconscious man in his arms and began a staggering, labored return. Time and again was he compelled to lay his burden down and rest, though the bullets continued to zip and whiz all about him. To his own

surprise, he felt no impulse to dodge or to burrow or to run, but, quietly, without flinching as a stinging, singing something stirred the hair above his cheek, awaited a measure of returning strength before resuming his appointed task. Zack was bleeding profusely from several ugly wounds, but the motion served to urge his sunken senses back to consciousness. His mind all at once became clear and alert and he remembered, and, remembering, grasped the present situation in a moment.

"Let go o' me, quick!" he cried, in a voice husky with emotion and suffering, but dictatorial yet. "An' you git behind that air hill fast's ever you kin! Jump, now! You mind me! Run! Let me down, I say, you're a-hurtin' me, an' you run, now! My leg's broke, I 'low, so I can't kick you, but I'll hammer you ter death with my fists if you do n't mind!"

"'T ain't ary bit o' use ter try ter pack me over yander," he expostulated, a moment later, growing drowsy from loss of blood, as Percy, panting, laid him down for a moment. "You'll jist git kilt your ownse'f, an' then there'll be two o' us dead 'stid o' one. Do n't be a idjit, Percy!"

Percy's only reply was a little smile, almost of deprecation, like that of one forced to refuse a child's petition which, if granted, would work to

its harm, as he stooped once more, gathered up Zack and proceeded on his stumbling way.

When the remnant of the company had accomplished the protection of the hill, somebody told the Captain about it — about young Selvin, the company's “cold-foot,” and about Zachariah Posey, the company's hero, out there together — and Sammy Goodman, the company's idol, felt for a moment as if the end of all had come indeed. “Why, Zack!” he cried aloud, with sobbing unbelief, as Selvin had cried. His thought in that first bewildered moment was all for Zack. Then his heart went out in quick gratitude to the laboring young fellow who was bringing him in. Selvin was now almost home, but it seemed as if he must fall from sheer exhaustion before that last little home stretch was run. With a bound, Sammy sprang to his assistance. A moment more, and the three were safe, the bullets whistling impotently over the hill.

A handkerchief was swiftly bound around Zack's leg to retard the worst of the bleeding. As he was about to be carried back to the hospital, he opened his eyes. They rested vaguely for a moment upon his bearers, then he asked feebly to see Percy Selvin.

“Where is he?” he demanded, weakly, but with insistence, as they hesitated. “I tell you I must speak ter him before I go back!”

"He's right here, Zack," interposed Sammy, quickly. "Do n't get so excited over nothing. Wait till you're hit before you squeal, old chap," he gibed, affectionately, hoping to allay Zack's growing and feverish excitement. Apprehension clutched him — but if it were so — Zack must not know — not now.

Glancing hastily around, he observed the figure stretched upon the ground with a number of company men gathered around it.

"When did it happen?" he asked them, in a hushed voice.

"He was wounded when he came in," one of the men replied. "Nobody knows just when it occurred. He was game; a bullet in the back."

Sammy knelt down beside the company coward.

"How are you, Selvin?" he inquired, gently. "I reckon you'll soon be ready for duty, won't you? To the hospital now — but do n't forget to report for duty at the first possible moment — we need you," he rallied him, though his heart sank at the look on the pale young face.

"I am done for, Captain," whispered Percy, in a voice scarcely audible so very fast were the sands of his life dropping — dropping — but he rallied and added in a stronger voice, even a majestic voice, "Do n't waste time on me, Captain! Take the company and silence that bat-

tery before it kills any more of us!” And he who had been so afraid of death, and so much more afraid of being hurt, looking that solemn, mysterious visitant closely in the face, suffering all the hurt that the flesh can suffer, could speak thus with earnest self-forgetfulness now that vague, emotional fear had met and grappled with grim reality; and even while stifling moans of unendurable pain, he smiled, because, after all, he was enduring it, he could bear it, he had only been afraid that he could n’t and afraid of the nightmare of panic that would follow his not being able to bear it. If one only really knew, knew the latent powers of the soul — there is nothing in the world one cannot bear. Sometimes, things kill you — but, strangely enough, you find you can bear that, too.

“ Don’t give up as easily as that, Selvin. Where would Zack be now if you had given him up that easily?” asked Sammy, feelingly. “ Here’s Zack now,” motioning the bearers of the stretcher to him. “ He wanted to speak to you before going to the hospital. Brace up, boy! You met your chance like — the man and soldier that you are. I do n’t want to hear anything more about being done for!”

“ Captain Sammy,” said Zack, “ I ’low you know ’bout Percy — what he done for me?”

“ Yes, I know, Zack.”

"Do you think he justified the chance you giv' him yander on the Osage?"

"A thousand-fold. I have told him so, Zack."

A pleased, triumphant smile flitted over Zack's drawn face.

"Good for you, Sammy. I knew he would all the time. I ain't much — I ain't worth it — but I knew you'd be pleased 'cause you're Sammy, an' you an' me both b'longs ter ol' Dubois together."

He had never told Captain Goodman nor the rest the half of his struggle with Percy Selvin's seemingly unconquerable fear, and he never did tell, now, so that the young fellow's memory went down the years with the company's survivors, a beautiful and a hallowed thing, unsullied by the things which Zack never told.

"Hit bad?" asked Zack, when the others had stepped aside with bowed heads, while Sammy made rapid mental plans for the disposition of his company somewhere over there to the right. Death, the war agent, does not stand respectfully while death goes by.

"There is n't to be another time, Zack," came from the bloodless lips of the dying boy, that hint of humor again scintillating in the brown eyes looking so far away into the unknown.

"I said so, did n't I?" muttered Zack, laugh-

ing huskily to hide his emotion — and not understanding. “ I always said so, an’ this time I knew. I ’m right sorry I kicked you an’ talked ter you like I done. You ’d orter o’ lef’ me out there — served me right. Before they pack me off ter the hospital, I ’d jist like ter hear you say you do n’t hold it ag’in me. I always liked you a passel, sonny, even when I railed at you most.”

“ Do n’t worry, Zack. I ’d have been shot in the back, anyway, and for the real thing if it had n’t been for you. This is better than a court-martial. It is much, much better as it is.”

“ Why do you git so skeert in battle when you ’re really a braver man than any o’ us? ” asked Zack, in wonder.

“ I was n’t cut out for a soldier, I guess,” said Selvin, simply. “ I ’m glad I could go when the ‘ hants ’ were n’t anywhere around. I don’t deserve it, but I am glad. Zack, when you see Miss Brown, will you tell her why I was shot in the back? Likely, the Captain will, but do you so, too, to make sure. Will you? ”

“ You kin jist bet I will,” said Zack, his huskiness increasing as the boy’s increasing weakness grew more apparent even to him who loved him. “ But I ’low you ’ll be up all right and tellin’ her first your ownse’f.

“ You will be lonesome without me to take care of, won’t you, for a little while? I wonder who

will march with you next time you march? I wonder if the war will be over when you get into Vicksburg? I wonder if he—the new fellow who is to march with you—will be afraid?" He was speaking dreamily, a little wistfully.

"Yes, I will be very lonesome," was all poor Zack could say, his frame shaking with sobs.

Sammy came up hastily and helped Selvin on the stretcher prepared for him.

"Good-by, Zack," whispered the dying boy, as Zack was borne away.

"Good-by, Percy, good-by, good-by."

"You are a brave boy, Selvin," said Sammy, brokenly. "Remember, you must hurry to get well. Company E can't afford to lose men like you."

"Thank you, Captain," a light leaping up into the closing eyes. He was very far away, but he had always yearned to hear words like these from his Captain's lips, so they carried over a great distance, and his yearning spirit met and heard them and, hearing, passed smilingly away.

Leading his company up the length of the ravine, Sammy observed that there was a small hill or knoll opposite the redoubt where the guns that were enfilading a part of the Union line were located, but, in order to get behind the knoll, it would be necessary to traverse a space of about fifty yards open to the enemy's fire. There was

no other way of obtaining the coveted position, however, and so the company, spreading out as in a skirmish line, raced over the distance, fortunately with but small loss. It was now in very good range of the battery and began effectively to pick off the gunners as fast as they came up, making it impossible for the enemy to operate the guns.

The company was not relieved nor did it receive any further orders. With the coming of night, most of the old-timers experienced somewhat of the eerie feeling that had beset them as pickets before Pea Ridge. When the short twilight had passed, Sammy, apprehensive that the enemy would march out and cut them off from the army, withdrew to the end of the ravine and remained there until nearly daylight when he ordered the men to slip quietly back to their old position behind the knoll. The morning light soon revealed the fact that the Federal troops had withdrawn from in front of the rebel works during the night; but, fearing another charge, and still receiving no orders, Sammy remained behind the knoll until late in the afternoon, when he received orders to come in.

As the company was passing brigade headquarters on its return, it was immediately stopped and Sammy ordered to report to General Benton. The General complimented him highly upon the

work he and his men had done. The words of unstinted commendation were sweet to the tired, heart-sick young officer who was thinking of the smiling soul gone, and of the friend of all his years whose life was wavering in the balance, and of the others out there on the hillside. Company E had paid very dear, but the gain in lives and future effectiveness to the army by the silencing of those enfilading guns was inestimable, so the bitter price was paid without haggling. The company deserved well of its country.

After this vain and costly attempt to carry the city by assault, the military seer decided to waste no more lives on such fruitless dreams of speedy capitulation, and the long siege began in earnest. The end was inevitable. On the Fourth Day of July, in the morning, as the Federal army, having replied to the rebel taunt, "First ketch your rabbit," by catching it, was lined up in front of the Confederate intrenchments, a white flag shot up away to the right as far as could be seen, then another, and another, and so on down the line to the end of it. The wan soldiers then marched out and stacked their guns. Not one cheer arose to hurt them. It spoke well for the great-heartedness of the men of the North. The vanquished, like them, were American soldiers, though mistaken, and had fought well and starved well.

CHAPTER XXII

SAMMY'S LAST SKIRMISH

IN THE very act of fraternizing with the gaunt, hungry remnant of Pemberton's army, sharing rations with their late antagonists, swapping siege tales, luxuriously contemplating a long, lazy rest and an indefinite immunity from the sound of guns and the sight of blood, came marching orders for the major portion of the victorious army. Men received the news with incredulous dismay and inward protestation. The shock was too great and unexpected for immediate acceptance. When they became convinced of the legitimacy and the irrevocableness of the orders, they fell into clamorous rebellion; which state of mind in turn gave way to the grim silence of utter disgust. They were weary, weary, weary, and it was hot, hot, hot, and the days had been many and long and pressed full since they first put step on the rebel side of the Mississippi. Zack's drop-jawed amazement and incredulity were so extreme that Sammy could not help laughing at him, although his own disappointment was almost as great. Zack's wounds

had proved not so serious as was at first feared, and he was again on duty, though he was still thin, pale, and emaciated from the suffering and confinement.

"'Pears like I ain't never goin' ter git no more rest in this here world," was his lugubrious complaint, as he rammed several days' rations into his haversack with spiteful pokes and digs as if they were responsible for the affront. "No more'n out o' the hospital than set ter hard labor diggin' trenches an' sichy, an' no sooner 'n we've earned one night's sleep, anyhow, than here we be — on the march ag'in — an' we took Jackson once. Wish ter goodness I'd o' let 'em sent me home ter 'cuperate when they wanted ter. Wish, almost, that I was where Percy is. He's restin', anyhow."

There was reason in Zack's complaint, but how was it to be helped? Johnston had been hovering as near as he dared for many days, hoping against hope to be able to get assistance to Pemberton in some way. When Vicksburg capitulated, Johnston immediately fell back upon Jackson. Sherman was in readiness to move against him the very moment the surrender of the besieged city made it practicable or desirable, and was to be joined in the movement by both Steele and Ord and their commands. The afternoon of that very day, the day of the Fourth, the

tired and heartily disgusted troops took up the trail of Johnston.

How dusty the roads and how hot! Mississippi in midsummer! The water was an affront to the system which craved cooling drink, but it had to be drunk, bad as it was. The men were already exhausted by the long, arduous, wearisome siege. Their unaccustomed northern blood had fairly seethed in the languorous, debilitating southern summer, until it had burned up its red corpuscles and flowed, a sickly, sluggish stream, through clogged and heavy veins. The hot, waterless, weary, weary, and unresting pursuit of Johnston was almost too much for them. It was too much for many — they dropped out, never to march again, at least on a militant earth; and the burning July sun, having done its worst, mockingly refused to warm them back to life again.

On the eleventh, Sherman was close up to the Confederate defences and began shelling the city. On the night of the sixteenth, the Eighteenth Indiana, which occupied a position so close to the besieged city that conversation with those within would have been practicable, had its feelings sadly harrowed and its patience and its sleep annihilated by the seemingly endless strains of an all-night band concert. To the unprejudiced, the music would have fallen upon appreciative

ears. It was beautiful, and the soft, dark, southern night was a beautiful setting. "Dixie," over and over again, and what melody there is in "Dixie," and then "The Bonnie Blue Flag," over and over again, and "Maryland, my Maryland," and then again "Dixie." "Way down South in Dixie." But to most of the harassed Eighteenth, the musical strains were swelling with defiance, triumph, pride, and flaunting insolence. With the close, still, hot dawn, came the knowledge of a quiet slipping away in the night under cover of the brave music of the South; and then Sammy knew why it had seemed to sound mournful and sad to his dreamy senses, even while to most, it had rung with vengeful insolence. "Dixie" had been a farewell, not a defiance.

After the siege of Jackson, the troops returned to Vicksburg where at last they rested for a few days, those, indeed, who were not too tired to rest, and those for whom the coveted respite had not come too late.

In August, that splendid Army of the Tennessee was mistakenly and under protest of its commanding general disintegrated, scattered hither and yon, a portion here, a portion there, no longer to be reckoned with as "man for man, officer for officer, the most perfect army ever marshaled under a flag." United, it had been

the invincible power that had cleared the Mississippi and cut the Confederacy in two; divided, it merely went to swell the numbers of other armies doing other things and which did not need it especially; its splendid strength as a cohesive unit dissipated.

It fell to the lot of Carr's old division under a new commander to be transferred to the Department of the Gulf, and near the middle of August, it went by transport to New Orleans. After a few weeks spent in the quaint old Creole city, the division went to Brashear City and from thence Benton's Brigade made a hundred-mile raid up the beautiful green-banked Bayou Teche, and inland to Opelousas. A part of Dick Taylor's army needed routing and it was the lot of the brigade to do the routing. It seemed to Sammy as if he had been suddenly transported to some other world, so quiet, so rich and fertile was the valley after the storm and stress of the battle fields of the ravished South. This, too, was the South, but what a different South! Union troops had never before set foot upon it. They were the first. So peaceful it was, after the noise and strife, so low and level, after the "set on edge" country around Vicksburg, so gigantic the forest growth and so tropical the vegetation, so quaint and, withal, so cultured and refined the dwellers within it — all French, descendants

of those Acadians so ruthlessly expelled from their peaceful homes and pursuits on English soil only to take root, to thrive and to blossom in a more generous soil, a fairer clime — that it was little wonder it seemed a foreign shore.

It seemed ruthless and wanton to destroy property in this beautiful, alluvial, peaceful valley, but war is a desecration at best, and, perhaps, if there had been more of such destruction in the beginning, there had been, in the end, less waste of blood, surely more precious than many lands or houses. Especially was it the duty of Benton's Brigade on this raid to destroy the sugar and mills on the big plantations in order to further cripple the source of supplies for the rebel armies and thus hasten the inevitable end.

Passing an extensive sugar plantation one day, the army was astonished at the great number of slaves who came crowding about the road to watch the troops pass by. There must have been five hundred of them, all told, field hands and house servants together, of all ages and descriptions, varying in color from coal black to the fairest blonde. One girl in the very midst of the throng of curious, gaping, barefooted spectators attracted Sammy's notice by what he at first deemed the unusualness of her association upon terms of such close intimacy with the colored multitude. With her blue eyes, brown hair, and

beautiful fair skin, she did seem oddly out of place. It was not until he noted her short, one-piece garment of coarse sacking, her bare feet, and her air of oneness with the rest — her badge of servitude — that he understood.

“What shame!” he muttered, under his breath.

The band struck up “John Brown’s Body,” and the darkies suddenly went wild. Gone was their seemingly apathetic staring. It must be remembered that these negroes had never before seen Union troops. They supposedly had never heard Union songs. Where had been their opportunity? And yet, at the first martial strains, faces lit up, eyes danced, and bodies swayed to the rhythm, while feet fairly spoke the music of the march.

“Why, do you know that tune?” asked the soldiers, in surprise.

“Yes, yes, yes, we does, we does, bress de Lawd!” cried several, and others took up the enraptured avowal, eagerly, as if something restraining had given away and it was a relief to let the pent up flood leap out at last. There was a freemasonry existing between the slaves of the South that their masters wotted not of, and the music of freedom carried far.

Suddenly, an old woman stepped majestically forward and took her stand in front of the others of her kind in bondage. She was tall and not

enfeebled despite her many years and her thankless toil in the sugar cane. Her hair was as white as snow and the seamed, strong face beneath it, black as ebony. She seemed a sybil, an inspired prophetess, as she raised her wrinkled hands to the sky and cried aloud, while her eyes, fixed upon things unseen of mortal man, seemed to be reading out of heaven that which her tongue gave utterance to. It was evident that her companions held her in the utmost respect and awe by the way they gave place to her and the reverence with which they listened to her solemn sentences.

“Ah see’d yo’ in de clouds — Ah see’d yo’ wif yo’ unifawms on — Ah knowed yo’ d come — Ah knowed yo’ d come — Ah been lookin’ fo’ yo’ long, long time, but Ah knowed yo’ d come — fo’ Ah see’d yo’ in de clouds — Ah see’d yo’ unifawms — an’ Ah knowed yo’ was er-comin’ — bress de Lawd, oh my soul!”

It was with a solemn, subdued feeling that the army passed on after this prophetic greeting, so earnest so believing and so inspired had the ancient negress been.

The engagement with Taylor’s detachment, while severe, was, for the most part, with cavalry and the fighting for the Eighteenth proved to be nothing at all. But, the rebels on the run and the homeward movement instituted, Company E was

detailed to act as rear-guard and escort the wagon train; and, as the troops did not see fit to wait, they soon distanced the crawling wagons and passed out of sight. It proved an anxious day for Sammy. The rebels were not so far behind but that a sudden sortie was entirely within the realm of possibilities, and they were so many that his company would be powerless to offer much resistance. However, no such expected event came to pass and no harm befell the worn little company, now a mere handful as compared with the full roll mustered in at Indianapolis.

It was on this return that the flocks of colored people who had before crowded down to stare now came crowding down to attach themselves to the procession. As the brigade passed the larger plantations, hundreds of men and women with a goodly sprinkling of "pickaninnies" presented themselves squarely in the road and were not to be denied. Their baggage in most cases was ludicrous in the extreme — a conglomerate mass of anything and everything dearest to their starved hearts. One old woman carried a feather tick on her head; another nicely balanced on her head a bag containing a half bushel or so of pecans. At one plantation, Sammy was met by a slight, worn, dignified, middle-aged woman who still bore traces of a once unusual beauty and who spoke English rather well,

though the French inflection was noticeable. She was confronted by a large, handsome, neatly-gowned negress who stood stolidly before her, indifferently making more secure the knot of a big blue bandana handkerchief which bound her possessions.

"You will make her to stay, Sir, you will insist," the little worn mistress was entreating, her dignity almost at the breaking point at the exigencies of her situation. "The cruel conscript — you know — I am all alone. Marie — she have been with me always. She was born in this house — she have everything — I cannot do all, alone. The rest have left me — all the field hands, all the house servants — all but Marie, my own maid — what shall I do if she go? And yet she will go!" She wrung her white, white hands despairingly. "The Commandant — he will insist that she remain."

"I am sorry, Madam," replied Sammy, gently, "but I have no authority over her. She must do as — seems best to her. If Marie will stay for a little while, it will not be long." He looked at the negro woman gravely, questioningly, but she shook her head mutely. The dream of her race was come true and she must go to meet her destiny or it might pass her by. The last thing Sammy saw as he turned in the late sunlight for a last glimpse of a crumbling institution, was the

slight, aristocratic figure of the worn but beautiful mistress, standing very still on the wide, green, neglected lawn, head drooping ever so slightly, a deserted mansion-house behind her, with night coming on, and she was alone.

The raiders met Lawler's Brigade at New Iberia, coming up the bayou in transports as reinforcements, superfluous, indeed, but Banks had been afraid.

The army returned to Berwick on the bay and from that point took ship and steamed down to the mouth of the Rio Grande, and from thence along the coast to Matanzas Island. This island is long and narrow and at the lower end was a rebel fort with a garrison of about one hundred and fifty men. It was the Colonel of the Eighteenth's idea to land the troops here at the upper end, march down to the fort and take it from the land side; but he decided first to go ashore himself with his adjutant and determine the practicability of landing the troops at this point, and Sammy promptly volunteered to accompany him, also. Sammy had an intense longing for the land. He was undergoing his first experience with seasickness and he did n't like it. Malarial or typhoid was nothing in comparison. White, drawn, limp, and sick, sick, sick, the inspiration to proffer his services to the colonel flared up in his nauseated soul like a beacon light, and he

never admired Colonel Washburn more than when that officer briefly accepted his company.

In the early morning, the troops marched down on the opposite side of the island, and, as the colonel had hoped and counted upon, the attention of the garrison was held by two battle-ships out in the Gulf. Approaching from the land side, the Federals were unnoticed, and they had captured the pickets and were climbing into the fort before the garrison was aware of their presence. It surrendered immediately — there was nothing else to do — but it is safe to assume that a more disgusted bunch of defenders never laid down arms.

Following this bloodless victory, the Union troops were ferried across Matanzas Pass to St. Joseph's Island. They marched up the island forty miles and approached the pass which is the entrance to Matagorda Bay from the Gulf side. Here was Fort Esperanza, commanding the pass, a very strong fortification with seven large guns and a garrison of eight hundred men. It was a large, triangular-shaped fortification with the side of the triangle which faced the pass bristling with the seven guns which bore upon the water, sweeping it and the beach between with frowning completeness. A lighthouse on the Gulf side, just out of range of the fort guns, marked the boundary of the safety zone for the Federal

troops. They early discovered that to attempt to proceed farther along the beach was to bring down the guns of the fort upon them.

Before daylight upon an early morning in December, the Eighteenth was stealthily sent north on the land side of the fort to reconnoiter and to ascertain if it would not be possible to find a favorable location for the planting of a battery to shell the fort from the rear. Finding a slight elevation which promised well for the success of the undertaking, the regiment was halted while Sammy was ordered to advance with his company yet farther toward the spot where the enemy was supposed to be, and to ascertain the exact rebel position in regard to the proposed site for the battery. A heavy fog rolled in from the sea and settled over the island just before day broke. It rendered the darkness of the dark hour preceding the dawn so dense that it seemed hard to breathe and doubled the hazard of the scouting party, as the rebel pickets were apt to be run up against without the slightest warning, as the thick fog rendered void all outline and all sense of distance.

Sammy deployed the company and then advanced in a skirmish line, stealthily but steadily, toward — fate. Shortly after daybreak, the fog lifted somewhat, and the rebel pickets stepped out of the gloom. A quick, uncontrollable shiver

passed over Sammy. The dawn was so chill and damp, so dreary and lonely, and the end was so near; for not only had the pickets emerged from the gloom — there was the big, frowning fort as well, looming up out of the lifting mists closer than any one had ever dreamed. But he recovered instantly, for it all depended upon him, upon Sammy Goodman of Dubois County, Indiana. And as it had done so many times before, the sense of responsibility braced him. His order to fire and charge the picket line was as clear and ringing as ever.

“Drive ’em in, boys, drive ’em in,” he yelled.

The pickets returned the fire with stubborn tenacity but retreated steadily toward the protection of the fort. The sound of the skirmish had attracted the attention of the rebel garrison and it now opened fire, under cover of which the pickets made good their entrance to safety — not all, however, for more than one lay wrapped in the winding sheet of the fog which still clung to the ground. But with the return of the pickets, the garrison did not cease firing and Company E was subjected to a terrible fusillade before it withdrew.

It was Zack who saw Sammy fall. He had been haunted, always, by this very dread. He cast aside his rifle, everything he carried, and went to Sammy. He made no outcry. He was

strangely calm, though he thought his friend was dead. But his face was much, much chalkier than was Sammy's own, lying white and still upon the ground.

"I 'low I 'll have ter pack him home after all — 'stid o' him me. I wish 't it had been the other way. I always wished it, but wishin' do n't seem ter count in this here world," he thought, dumbly.

They carried him out of range of the still cracking rifles, the boys of his company, and then they bore him back to the waiting regiment.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE OLD STUMP

“**W**HAT ’S the matter, Sammy?”

Sammy raised his head from his arms which were resting on the gate post and beheld a winsome girl-woman standing before him in the road. She had been tripping past but paused to exchange a word of greeting with the returned neighborhood hero, who was also Zack’s best friend.

“Matter enough, Susie,” said Sammy, gloomily.

“I hope you won’t stay mad at things long,” said Susie, artlessly. “’Pears like a body ain’t got no need ter git mad on sich a sweet day.”

“Evil is evil, little Susie, and one can’t put it off just because the weather is fair. It has to be met some time, better now and have it over and done with.”

“Mebbe not,” replied Susie, sagely. “If you save it up for a rainy day, I ’low it might git tired o’ waitin’ an’ go ’round. What’s pesterin’ you, Sammy? You look like you’d orter be in the hospital yit. You’re as saller as a summer squash.”

"You, at least, have altogether recovered from your wounds. You are positively blooming today," replied Sammy, heartily, and she was. Her sunbonnet trailed down her back, held from completely slipping into the dust of the road by loosely knotted pink strings. The warm sun of the spring day made her pretty brown hair to curl bewitchingly over her forehead, and her cheeks were as pink as the cluster of peach blossoms hanging over the fence.

"I — I — been up ter Mis' Posey's ter deliver a message," said Susie, blushing and dimpling, "an' I walked 'cause pap was usin' the team, an' it makes me warm," thus she explained her blushes, blushing the more in the explanation. "But that ain't tellin' what's pesterin' you, Captain Sammy. You heard bad news from anybody?"

"Very bad news. The worst, I think, that I could possibly hear. The doctor has been here this morning, Susie. He said that I — am not fit enough to go back to my company," said Sammy, soberly.

"Why, Sammy! Never?"

"Never. Not for a year, anyway, and then it will be too late. He said I might have gotten the best of the bullet wound if it had not been for the exhaustion preceding it. The typhoid and the marches, I have to thank for that, I reckon.

I do n't just see the use of my getting well at all — if I can't go back. What is the use?"

He thought he had conquered his rebellion. He had fought it out up in the seclusion of the old attic where he and Zack had watched for ghosts and planned so many 'coon hunts and other backwoods amusements. It had taken most of the morning to get this grip on himself. The struggle had been so bitter — so bitter. It had brought tears — hot, man's tears — it had exhausted him; but the storm was spent now. He thought he had conquered. But his voice still vibrated with the sting of his protesting soul.

It was just such another day as the one on which he had come home on leave of absence a year ago. What high hopes were thrilling him then! Well, he had survived Vicksburg for — this! Was it worth while? Company E, the regiment, the old Eighteenth, would go on to the dearly bought but glorious end, while he, he, Sammy Goodman, loafed around with the women and children! It would have been better — far better — to have fallen there on the Vicksburg slopes, or if the aim of that Fort Esperanza rebel had been a little truer! He had paved the way for the locating of the battery. It was through him and his that the battery had been able to get in behind and shell that important and menacing rebel stronghold on St. Joseph's Island so effec-

tively that it fell, and the passes threatened Federal transports and gunboats no more. If he could have died then, in preparing the way for that splendid assault — which took place while he lay unconscious in the field hospital — his life would have gone out in honor.

He shook himself savagely free from these mawkish and unwholesome musings, and smiled at a friendly little squirrel running along the top rail of the fence in close proximity to where Sammy was leaning, while several of the less venturesome of his kind scampered up the tree trunks and chattered in the leafy boughs. Besides, the women did not loaf. Theirs was the hardest part of all. They must still rear the children and maintain their homes; they must also plough and plant and reap. They must be two-bodied and two-souled. They must be women and they must be men. No, the women of the war were not loafers. He could help Mollie till the war was over, perhaps then he might go out into the world again. He would be content until then.

The air was heavily laden with the fragrance of blossoming fruit trees, apple and peach, and vibrated with the hum of bees hovering over the blossoms, and flashed with gay butterflies darting hither and yon or drowsily floating on wide-spread wing. Fussy, important-looking hens

were scratching for their downy chicks in the barnyard, clucking incessantly, and the dreamy suggestion of their anxious maternal solicitude brought back to Sammy the memory of that day when he thought he was at home because of the old familiar sounds, and awoke to find Sara Brown at his bedside. No Company E — no Sara Brown — well, men had lived without either!

“I ’most wish Zack would git wounded,” said Susie, plaintively. “Then mebbe they ’d send him home ter git strong, an’ mebbe it would take him a year ter do it in. My, I *do* wish it — almost.”

“He was wounded, you know, Susie, at Vicksburg,” said Sammy, gently, “but he would n’t come home. He left the hospital only to report for duty again. I would change places with him if I could — oh, if I only could! That would not content Zack, though. He is a good soldier, Susie, and the best man I ever knew. You must love him very much to make up.”

“Make up for what, Sammy?” asked the girl, in innocent wonder.

“Oh, for lots of things — like playing ghost on him, for instance — but especially for his being such an altogether fine fellow,” replied Sammy, a little sadly, recollecting that, for Zack’s sake if for no other reason, he must not say, “to make up for being blood kin to Hank

Halstead." That was his own bitterness and must be borne alone — and conquered — for Zack's sake. "I see you have a letter from him. How is the old rascal?"

"Right peart, he says, but how did you know it was from Zack?" inquired the puzzled Susie.

"Several things told me, your radiant face, your errand, and the gorgeous picture on the letter paper."

"I don't care," declared Susie, poutingly, "he's the best boy in the world, if you air a-laughin' at him."

"I'm not laughing at him, Susie. No one knows Zack better than I do, I think," said Sammy, gravely. "I only wish that he were here — safe — with you, and that I could take his place."

"You have n't got a girl have you, Sammy?" asked Susie, dreamily. "I hain't hearn tell o' any lately, so I 'low you do n't know how 'tis ter a girl ter be a-waitin' for you ter come home from the war."

"I love a girl, Susie, but she is n't mine, and she is n't waiting for me to come home from the war."

"Your old sweetheart's a-comin' back, did you know that? Mary Ann Hamilton an' her pap's a comin' back ter Dubois County ter live. They moved 'way out West. You used ter set a heap

Sammy did not rise to his feet immediately. He had first to conquer the ache in his heart before greeting Mary Ann. How very many things he had to conquer of late, and the world of a man is not so easy to conquer as the world of a boy. When he did rise, grave, war-worn, sad, he was still the same friendly, self-confident, condescending, protecting Sammy who had escorted Mary Ann through the gloomy, ghost-haunted, imagination-peopled, panther-menaced forest of long ago — a little less condescending, perhaps, a little less self-confident, a little less wise — war gives much, and it also takes away. And there was Sara Brown laughing at him as little Mary Ann had never dared to laugh in those old days. It was not until then that he knew.

Still more than it had ever seemed before was the summer forest while he held her close. It was as if it held its breath for fear of disturbing the lovers.

“But why, *why*, did n’t you tell me?” was Sammy’s puzzled plaint.

“I do n’t know,” said Mary Ann, shaking her head as if her waywardness and willfulness were past understanding. “Just because, I ’low. I think maybe, however, that it was because you did n’t know me, Sammy. It hurt. I knew you.”

“Oh, yes,” he assented, loftily, but kissing the roguish face, “How could you help it when I

bawled out my presence in such important tones through your barred door?"

"Remember how young you were, Sammy," she said, mischievously, and then added, with conviction, "I should have known you anywhere, if you had never said a word."

"But why so hard on me? Women change a lot more than men, and we thought you had moved 'way out West. Come to think of it, Missouri is 'way out West to us Dubois County folks, but somehow I had it in my head that it was Dakota or somewhere in the really West. And Zack did n't know you, nor Herbert, nor Hank Halstead."

"But I did n't care anything about whether they knew me or not. We really were going under the name of Brown while we were in Missouri. After leaving Indiana we went to Illinois and bought a farm. Shortly before you saw me in Missouri we sold the farm, and on the day of the sale one half of the purchase price was paid to my father in one of the stores in the little town near our home. There was no one present except the storekeeper, my father and the man purchasing and a man who had only been in the neighborhood a few weeks. After the man who had bought our farm went out, my father carelessly laid his pocketbook on the counter and went down farther into the store to look at some goods. When he

came back for his pocketbook it was not there, neither was the stranger. Of course he had the man arrested but none of the money was found on him and there was not evidence enough to convict him. Later the man moved to Missouri and bought a farm. Father shaved off his beard and changed his style of clothing and his name and we rented a farm next to the one this man had bought, hoping we might learn something that would prove that he took our money. I do n't think he recognized my father for they had never met before that time in the store, but during the short time we were there we were not able to get any hint as to whether he took the money or not. If the Guerrillas had left us alone I think we might have eventually found out something. One of the reasons why I did n't make myself known to you was because we were so poor on account of our loss, and I was so shabbily dressed, I was ashamed to let my old schoolmate know who I was."

"Will you marry me, Mary Ann?"

She nodded, happily, then whispered. "And now you know why Sara Brown would n't marry you. She so wanted you to marry Mary Ann."

His heart leaped within him, but there was still one more thing to say.

"It was a costly campaign, Vicksburg, and a bitter. It was bloody, bloody, bloody. Do n't

you think Sara Brown might have told me then for fear I might never know?"

She came close, close to him. The brown eyes were full of tears that did not fall.

"That is why I came to tell you now. Oh, Sammy, the agony, the agony, that I let you go — like that — and for no better reason than that I wanted you to know me first. For I loved you, Sammy, when I was only little backwoods Mary Ann, and I so wanted you to remember me. I tried to make you know me here — that day when it stormed. Don't you remember how I looked at you? And when you would not, I said to myself that you should never know through me. I would never tell you. But I came to tell you. I could not bear the agony. What if you had died! It is my penance — to come to you without the asking. You did n't ask Mary Ann, you know. Forgive me, Sammy, and love me, only love me, and I care not whether you marry Mary Ann or Sara Brown."

